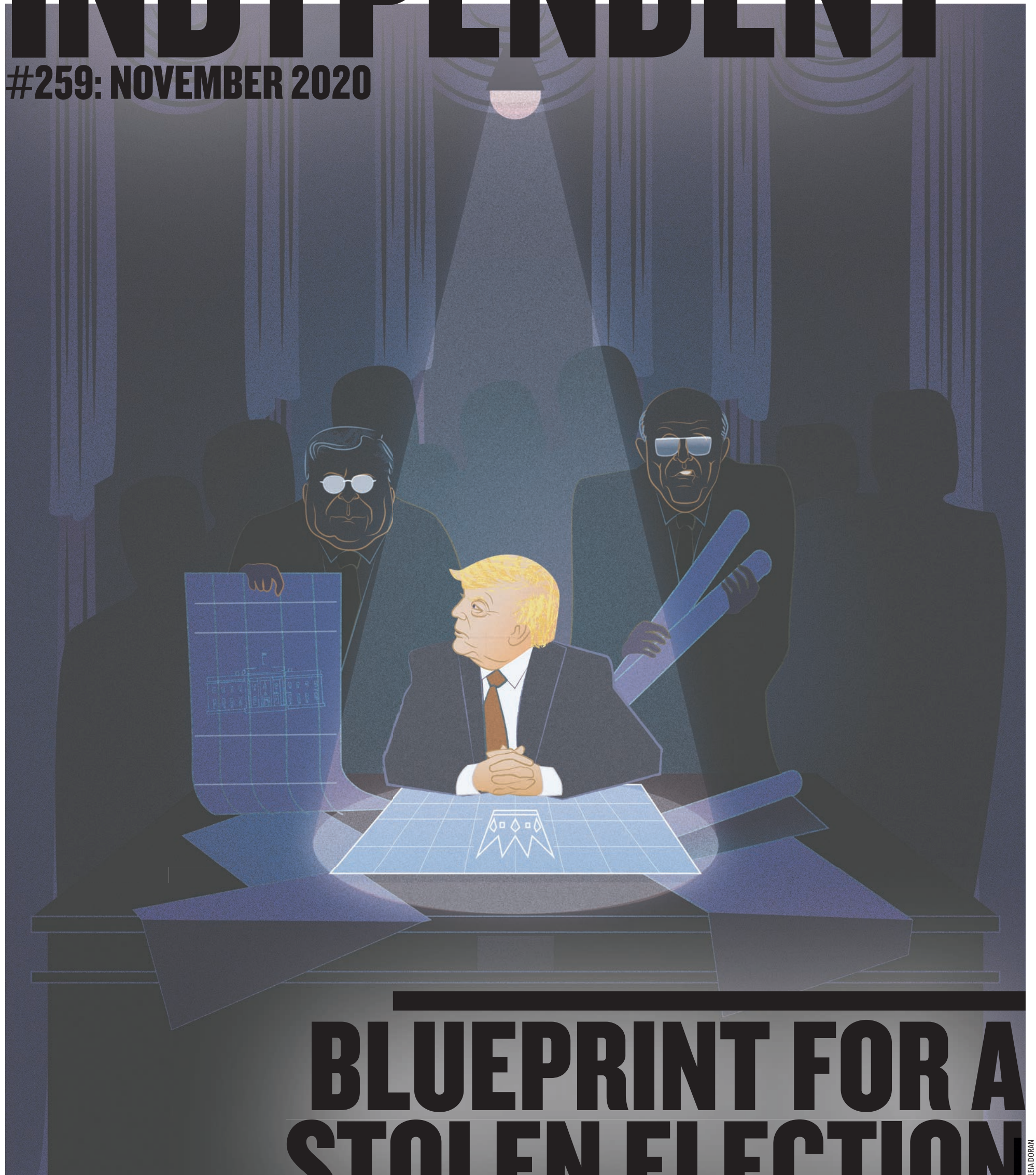


THE

BROOKLYN HOSPITAL CLOSURE LOOMS, P4

# THE INDYPENDENT

#259: NOVEMBER 2020



## BLUEPRINT FOR A STOLEN ELECTION

AND HOW TO STOP IT. P10-13

LEIA DORAN




**THE INDYPENDENT, INC.**

388 Atlantic Avenue,  
2nd Floor  
Brooklyn, NY 11217  
212-904-1282  
www.indypendent.org  
Twitter: @TheIndypendent  
facebook.com/TheIndypendent

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Powers, Steven Wishnia

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**DESIGN DIRECTOR**

Mikael Tarkela

**DESIGNERS**

Leia Doran, Anna Gold, Evan  
Sult

**ADMINISTRATIVE MANAGER**

Amba Guergerian

**INTERNS**

Katya Schwenk

**GENERAL INQUIRIES:**

contact@indypendent.org

**SUBMISSIONS & NEWS TIPS:**

submissions@indypendent.org

**ADVERTISING & PROMOTION:**

ads@indypendent.org

**VOLUNTEER CONTRIBUTORS**

Linda Martín Alcoff, Charlyne  
Alexis, Eleanor J. Bader,  
Bennett Baumer, Sue Brisk,  
Roman Broszkowski, Valerio  
Ciriaci, Rico Cleffi, Renée  
Feltz, Lynne Foster, Esteban  
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SUEBRISK

# NYPD BLOWS OT BUDGET, AGAIN

BY ROMAN BROSZKOWSKI

Despite assurances from New York City officials that its overtime budget would be slashed by 60 percent, the NYPD is already on track to overspend its \$268 million allowance — in spite of being only three months into its 2021 fiscal year.

“For the first three months of the current fiscal year, which began in July, NYPD has recorded overtime costs for uniformed officers of nearly \$86 million,” wrote Doug Turetsky, the chief of staff and communications director for New York City’s Independent Budget Office — a publicly funded agency that provides information about New York City’s budget to the public — in an emailed comment to *The Independent*. “That puts the police department on pace to exceed its overtime budget by roughly \$116 million this year.”

These updated financial estimates represent the newest turn in a long-running fight over the NYPD’s budget. While City officials pledged over the summer to cut close to \$1 billion in police spending, activists maintain that the city is simply playing a budgetary shell game to give the appearance of reductions while dismissing demands to defund.

Critics point to the city’s promise to reduce overtime spending from \$820 million to \$268 million as an egregious example of this deception. Experts in both the city’s Independent Budget Office (IBO) and in the policing justice ecosystem argue that officials lack the stomach to actually prevent the NYPD from going over budget with overtime and that these cuts are therefore unlikely to happen. And a lot more overtime spending could be on the way if there are ongoing protests over a disputed presidential election.

“Whether the name of the mayor has been Giuliani, Bloomberg, or de Blasio, [the] NYPD has seemingly been able to generate overtime as it sees fit,” Turetsky wrote.

The IBO wrote in their “IBO’s Updated

**BANK ON IT:** A disputed presidential election could keep the NYPD’s overtime budget soaring.

Economic and Revenue Forecast and Review of the Adopted Budget for 2021” Snapshot that “[While] the budget assumes overtime can be reduced by roughly 60 percent from the 2017-2019 average to \$268 million in 2021 ... IBO estimates that 2021 NYPD overtime will actually be \$400 million higher than budgeted.”

Brooklyn College Professor of Sociology and author of *The End of Policing* Alex Vitale is even more pessimistic.

“Already we see signs that [NYPD] just are going to blow right through the overtime budget that was allocated to them,” he said. “I’m sure they’ll get to that 800 million number,”

NYPD overtime spending has steadily increased over the years. According to the Citizen Budget Commission of New York (CBC-NY), between 2014–2020, the NYPD averaged \$711 million in yearly overtime.

The vast majority of this overtime is spent on functions that mostly deal with low-level offenses, Vitale explains.

“A huge amount of [NYPD overtime] is for patrol functions and this is preventable,” he said.

The reasons behind the department’s ballooning overtime budget are multifaceted.

“Some of [it] is probably cultural, and some institutional in terms of how the department chooses to police events from street fairs to protests,” Turetsky wrote.

According to Robert Gangi, director of the Police Reform Organizing Project — a public advocacy group — the NYPD’s rampant overtime spending stems from a lack of oversight.

“There’s no effective outside monitor,” he said. “So there’s no agency that will literally or figuratively make the NYPD pay a price for not sufficiently controlling overtime expenses. So in effect, whatever overtime expenses the department incurs the city makes sure that that money is available to cover [them].”

Yet for some activists the question of why the NYPD’s overtime budget has been allowed to expand is mute.

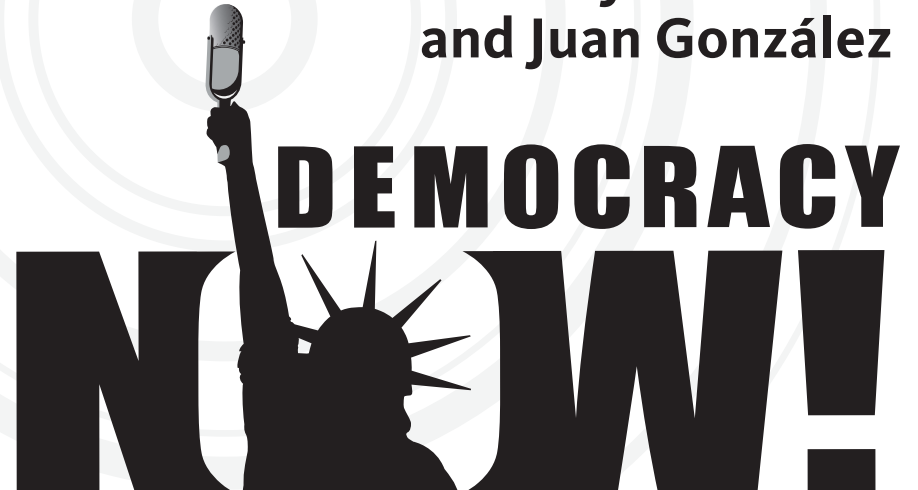
To Tatiana Hill — a civil rights organizer with VOCAL-NY — the answer is obvious.

“[It’s] because the police represent protecting the people in power,” she said. “[These budgeted overtime cuts] are not realistic. It’s not going to happen. That’s a joke, honestly.”

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# FIGHTING FOR THE HOSPITAL

**‘MORE BLACK BROOKLYNITES WILL DIE,’ HEALTH-CARE WORKERS SAY OF CUOMO’S PLAN TO CLOSE KINGSBROOK JEWISH MEDICAL CENTER BY END OF DECEMBER**

BY ROSIE RUDAVSKY

At the end of the workday, Aneela Nasim peeled off her jumpsuit, changed her shoes and got in her car. Sometimes she sat and cried. Sometimes she had to just sit for a while and process the day in her head, moment by moment, before she was able to move. When she got home, Nasim came in by the back door and went straight down to the basement. She slept apart from her 10-year-old child for months during the surge of COVID-19 cases last spring.

Nasim has been a nurse at Kingsbrook Jewish Medical Center in Brooklyn’s East Flatbush neighborhood for almost five years. It was her first job. During the height of the epidemic, she would walk past the cold storage trucks outside, where dead bodies were kept. Hospital storerooms and offices were converted to patient rooms, and nurses had to move from one patient to another, responding to the constant sound of codes — signifying a medical emergency, like cardiac or respiratory arrest — going off down the hall.

“We had code after code, like flies,” Nasim recalls. “You would come out of the room, and the next minute you go back in and the patient is gasping for air.”

Patients who passed away during the time when no outside visitors were allowed were comforted by health-care workers in their final moments.

Nasim recalls staying with one patient until he died. He had been in the hospital for about three weeks. On his last day, he asked for a cup of tea with garlic — his wife had told him this would help. Though he was alert, he declined quickly, Nasim remembers, and he died soon after being intubated.

“I’m so glad I was wearing a shield on my face,” she says. “I just had tears rolling down my eyes. I could never forget his face.”

In April, after five Kingsbrook staff members died of the coronavirus, hospital workers rallied outside the hospital for personal protective equipment, saying that insufficient protective gear had contributed to the deaths. Concerns over PPE are no longer front and center. Kingsbrook faces a new challenge.

It could soon cease to exist as a functioning hospital.

...

KINGSBROOK IS SLATED to slowly expire over the final two months of the year.

Already, five coma recovery beds, 20 traumatic-brain-injury beds and 41 medical/surgical beds have closed. By Dec. 31, the rest of the 163 medical/surgical, 10 intensive-care-unit and 10 coronary-care-unit beds will be gone for good — even as the city faces a possible second wave of COVID-19 infections this winter. The Kingsbrook facility will continue as a collection of ambulatory and outpatient-care clinics.

The New York State Nurses Association and 1199SEIU, which represent the health-care workers at Kingsbrook, have received guarantees that their members will be reassigned to jobs at other hospitals if they are unable to remain at Kingsbrook. Still, many of the workers are concerned that closing the hospital will deprive the community of care, especially with a resurgence of the pandemic threatening.

“By closing this hospital before the second wave of the pandemic, which has the possibility of being worse than the first, [Gov. Andrew] Cuomo is working to ensure that even more Black Brooklynites will die,” says a petition signed by 300 Kingsbrook health-care workers and 80 from other institutions.

Jo Ann Brown, a dietician at Kingsbrook who is organizing against the closure, says removing hospital beds will compound the





# HEIR

racial and economic inequities that the hospital and community face.

Brooklyn already has 2.2 hospital beds for every 1,000 people, while Manhattan has six. “We have some of the highest rates of long-term chronic disease,” Brown explains. “When you compare that to Manhattan, where incomes are higher and people have better access to health care, how could you take away beds, especially from people who, for most of their lives, have not had adequate access to health care? I mean, this is a public health emergency. This is a racial issue.”

Kingsbrook serves a largely Caribbean, Black and immigrant population. It’s a “safety net” hospital — one that provides care regardless of a patient’s ability to pay — and almost 90 percent of its patients are either Medicare and Medicaid recipients or have no health insurance. Medicare and Medicaid reimburse at a rate below the actual cost of its services, and because Kingsbrook has so few patients with private insurance, it cannot offset its costs. Like many safety-net hospitals, it operates on a very tight budget, making cuts to inpatient services a financially attractive option.

The loss of hospital beds and inpatient services has been a pattern across the city over the past two decades. Since 2003, 18 hospitals in New York City have closed, most in low-income neighborhoods that are home to people of color, according to the Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development.

Some of those closures, including those of St. Vincent’s in the West Village and Long Island College Hospital in Cobble Hill, two of the city’s affluent neighborhoods, have become notorious as giveaways to politically connected luxury real-estate developers.

Alexander Rovt, a billionaire real-estate developer, sits at the head of the board of directors of One Brooklyn Health, a not-for-profit corporation established in 2017 that owns Kingsbrook; two other Brooklyn safety net hospitals, Interfaith Medical Center and Brookdale University Hospital Center; a nursing home; and a dozen ambulatory clinics.

Rovt made his fortune as a Ukrainian fertilizer magnate before investing heavily in New York real estate — as well as in Gov. Andrew Cuomo, who has received more than \$350,000 in campaign donations from Rovt and his wife, Olga, since 2010.

“It raises questions about whether the nature of this project is about making money for some people or whether it’s about truly meeting public health and community needs,” says Kingsbrook nurse Julie Keefe.

• • •

GOV. CUOMO’S PLAN is framed as a transformation of Central Brooklyn’s health-care services that will provide much-needed improvements to the community through outpatient health services and affordable housing. It will consolidate Kingsbrook, Interfaith and Brookdale into a unified health care system that aims to be more cost-efficient. The plan proposes remaking Kingsbrook’s five-acre campus into a “medical village” that would include affordable housing units with on-site urgent care, primary and specialty-care services. While the rehab and psychiatric units would remain open for inpatient care, all other services would be outpatient.

The unified health system, says Enid Dillard, Kingsbrook’s director of marketing and public affairs, will provide transportation between facilities, so emergency-department patients can be transferred to an inpatient care facility nearby if needed. Suite 100, Kingsbrook’s outpatient specialty-care center, will continue its services. If patients need to be admitted, Dillard explains, doctors will recommend that they be transferred to Brookdale or Interfaith. Many patients may be assigned a new doctor in a new location.

Dillard is enthusiastic about the changes, saying that they will provide services that the neighborhood’s residents often lack — primary care, preventative care and access to specialists. The medical village will have care targeted toward strokes, diabetes and heart disease, all ailments prevalent in the community.

“Everything that we know is plaguing our community in terms of chronic disease, is what we will be focusing on in that medical village, in an outpatient capacity,” she says.

While Kingsbrook health-care workers see the closure of inpatient beds as a threat to the community’s health, Northwell Health’s 2016 Brooklyn Study, the study that has guided the transformation plan, concluded that Kingsbrook’s inpatient beds were never full and that the area in fact had too many hospital beds.

The study used numbers from 2015. During the coronavirus surge last spring, according to Dillard, Brookdale, Interfaith and Kingsbrook combined had fewer than 500 COVID-19 patients occupying hospital beds, with about 120 of them inpatients at Kingsbrook.

Julie Keefe, who was fighting to save her patients’ lives, disputes that. At the height of the pandemic’s first wave, she says there were over 200 beds at Kingsbrook constantly full with desperately ill coronavirus patients.

“The idea that a hospital is going to be closed and beds lost before we even reach the height of the next wave is almost unbelievable,” she told *The Independent*. “It’s scary. It’s not cautious or careful.”

Closing the hospital, Nasim says, would be “just putting a shot into somebody’s head and just killing them. This is crazy.”

Keeping Kingsbrook open, she adds, is “not about this job, it’s not about anybody’s job. It’s just for the patients, and the community also. We can find jobs anywhere, but during the pandemic, it would be very hard for the patients and the community. We have to be there to assist them.”

**ESSENTIAL:** Aneela Nasim has worked for almost five years as a nurse at Kingsbrook Jewish Medical Center in East Flatbush.

**TORN SAFETY NET:** Hospital workers and community members rallied outside Kingsbrook Jewish Medical Center in East Flatbush Brooklyn on Oct. 26 to protest plans to close all 163 beds at Kingsbrook by the end of the year. Kingsbrook serves East Flatbush’s predominantly Caribbean-American residents.



SUE BRIS

## COMMUNITY CONCERNS

What does it mean for a community when their hospital closes? The *Indypendent* recently spoke with East Flatbush residents outside the Kingsbrook Jewish Medical Center, which is slated to be closed at the end of 2020.

### KEITH DOWNER

#### Neighborhood resident for 10 years.

Well, it’s tragic, but it’s no surprise. That seems to be kind of the trend, closing hospitals, closing certain important places that used to benefit the community.

I remember there was a nice hospital up here called St. Mar that just closed out of the blue. Long Island College Hospital too. A lot of minorities used to benefit and then just big business took over, tearing things down for apartment buildings. They tell you it’s gonna be inclusive with low-income people, but you never see that much, you know, you might see a small percentage. I’m not surprised, cause that’s money.

I’ve seen a trend where they’re closing down the major hospitals, and they’re putting up these little medical places, you know what I mean? Soon there probably won’t be any hospitals. Maybe some would say it’s institutional racism.

### LAYNE

#### Kingsbrook Hospital nurse.

I don’t think that a lot of the community kind of caught wind of it yet. I think it will have a large effect on the community because this place has been here for a long time. Closing beds puts pressure on the other hospitals. There are still COVID patients. And these people need us.

### CECELIA BARRAN

#### Neighborhood resident.

#### Kingsbrook patient for 20 years.

Why didn’t they already send letters to patients? I am a diabetic and a hypertensive case, and now I have a problem with my foot. Kingsbrook is convenient for me because I just live a few blocks up the road. This is my hospital. They have all of my records there. So when I fall sick I have to look for another hospital?

### BEVERLY EDWARDS

#### Neighborhood resident.

My mother, she was sick, I was there taking care of her, when all of a sudden she came down with this coughing. She was almost 100 years old. And I brought her here, at the end of April. Then she didn’t come home, I never seen her again. We buried her, just two persons, me and my son, nobody else at the funeral. It was terrible.

They said no visitor, no visitor, until she died. What’s gonna happen if they close? It’s rough already, can’t be any more rougher. So what will happen next? More dying?

### FABIOLA

#### Neighborhood resident & former health care worker.

It’s not a perfect time to close beds. They should wait, but maybe they need funds or something?

A lot of the underserved population will have a problem. I know it’s not good, but at the same time it’s not far from other hospitals. So if people cannot come here they will go to other hospitals. But also that means it might become overcrowded.





VOICE OF GOWANUS

# SHOWDOWN AT THE GOWANUS CANAL

## NEIGHBORHOOD GROUPS FACE OFF OVER THE LARGEST REZONING PLAN OF THE DE BLASIO ERA

BY JORDAN G. TEICHER

On Sept. 22, residents of Brooklyn's Sunset Park celebrated the news that Industry City's developers had withdrawn their application to the city for a massive rezoning.

Local grassroots groups had fought for years to block the rezoning, which would have converted most of the industrial complex to offices and big-box stores, on the grounds that it would accelerate gentrification and leave the community vulnerable to climate change. As activists saw it, the plan's defeat was not just a victory for Sunset Park, but for other neighborhoods looking to determine their own future.

Now, another land-use struggle just a few R-train stops north will test that. On Sept. 29, the city announced that it would restart the paused Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP) for rezoning Gowanus by January.

If approved, the plan would bring as many as 20,000 new residents to the neighborhood. It would allow for the construction of 8,000 new homes, including 3,000 below-market-rate units. (The largest of the proposed "affordable housing" developments, the Gowanus Green complex, would sit in a flood zone on the site of a former gas plant where carcinogenic coal tar has seeped 153 feet into the ground.)

The Gowanus rezoning is the largest proposed under the de Blasio administration, and likely one of the last to reach the ULURP public-review process before the mayor's term ends next year. It also incorporates the mandatory inclusionary housing rule, which since 2016 has required developers building in an upzoned area to make 25 to 30 percent of the units they build rent for less than the market rate.

While both Sunset Park and Gowanus are among the areas along the Brooklyn waterfront most vulnerable to climate change, there are differences between the two plans. Industry City's rezoning was developer-led and situated in a mostly Latino and immigrant neighborhood. Gowanus's rezoning is city led and in a majority-white

neighborhood, at least outside the nearby public-housing projects.

Yet activists say the fights against both plans are part of a larger movement against the real-estate industry being the primary driver of community improvement in New York. The Gowanus rezoning struggle, they say, presents an opportunity to highlight the weaknesses of the prevailing planning ideology and to build support for systemic change.

"I think that the struggle over Gowanus could be pivotal to this public discussion about the future of the waterfront and the future of the city," says Tom Angotti, professor emeritus of urban policy and planning at Hunter College and the CUNY Graduate Center.

• • •

ACTIVISTS IN GOWANUS face an uphill political battle.

While politicians at the federal, state and city levels opposed the Industry City rezoning, Gowanus's councilmembers, Brad Lander and Stephen Levin, support the rezoning on the condition that the city amends it to provide badly needed funding for the neighborhood's public-housing complexes.

The Fifth Avenue Committee, the nonprofit co-developer of Gowanus Green, has also called on the city to incorporate funding for Gowanus's public housing. As the lead organizer of the Gowanus Neighborhood Coalition for Justice (GNCJ), which includes environmental justice groups and NYCHA residents, the committee has also demanded that the city's plan create an environmental-justice special district and ensure that new development won't contribute to sewer overflow into the Gowanus Canal. (The city's filtration facility and cistern to sanitize raw sewage that flows into the canal won't be completed until 2032.)

Those demands so far remain unmet, but in September, Michelle de la Uz, the Fifth Avenue Committee's executive director, joined Lander—who is the committee's former head—in urging the city to begin the ULURP process anyway.

"If you want to have a public process with the people that have been most engaged in this under the de Blasio administration — Councilmembers Lander and Levin — then you have to start it at a certain point, or else it won't end any time before their terms end," she says. "I think we've gotten as much as we can at this point, and then hopefully we can get to the finish line before the end of ULURP."

If the city's plan ultimately doesn't meet GNCJ's core demands, she says, the Fifth Avenue Committee and its coalition partners will oppose it — and she insists Lander and Levin would join them. Others aren't so sure, including Michael Higgins, a former Fifth Avenue Committee employee. He believes that Lander's eagerness to restart the ULURP process before the end of his term means he's unlikely to walk away from the city's plan.

"At the end of the day, he is very committed to this process. He spent the last six, seven years talking about the rezoning," Higgins says. "That doesn't necessarily mean that Brad won't do the right thing in this case. It's possible — maybe unlikely, but possible."

• • •

SOME HOUSING ADVOCATES and Gowanus community groups believe the ULURP process could still deliver a positive outcome for the neighborhood. Voice of Gowanus, a coalition of half a dozen neighborhood groups, is not one of them.

The group has long opposed the rezoning, on the basis that neither environmental remediation nor affordable housing for Gowanus should be tied to real-estate interests. They're also skeptical that other neighborhood activists can extract meaningful concessions from the city through ULURP — especially given that the process, during the pandemic, will be conducted online.

"There are many demands that they make that are good, but they shouldn't be reliant on the rezoning to get them," says Margaret Maugenest, a member of Voice of Gowanus.

That idea is growing in popularity across the city. Progressive candidates for city offices are refusing to accept real-estate campaign contributions, and are running on platforms that present direct public investment in new social housing as an alternative to the city's market-driven approach to building affordable housing. Brandon West, a candidate for Lander's council seat, has proposed a city-wide framework intended to bring decisions about neighborhood planning under community control.

"This idea that we can only build housing by giving developers a lot of what they want before we really think holistically about the community's needs is, I think, false," he says.

A new planning vision, Gowanus activists say, is possible. To win it, they're turning their attention to next year's city elections and expanding their outreach outside Gowanus' borders. "We're looking to build a coalition of activists from around the city," says Jack Riccobono, a Voice of Gowanus member. "We've been in touch with groups in Inwood, Sunset Park, Flushing, and Long Island City—and with the representatives we believe will be the future leaders of the city."

This summer, Voice of Gowanus called on the city to pause the ULURP process until public meetings could be held in person and the city could conduct a racial-impact study on the rezoning. Stalling the plan, however, is unlikely. But even if the rezoning process continues, Riccobono says he and other activists are prepared to keep fighting to change hearts and minds in the neighborhood and recruit them for the longer, larger struggle ahead.

"This is not just one neighborhood's issue. This is a citywide problem," Riccobono says. "I'm hopeful that we can fix this broken system."

### ZOOMING OUT:

Members of Voice of Gowanus protest on the Carroll Street Bridge during an Oct. 22 virtual meeting of Brooklyn Community Board 6.





LITVIA MARIANO

# HOUSING FOR THE PEOPLE

## MAJOR SQUATTER VICTORY IN PHILADELPHIA STIRS HOPES IN NYC

BY STEVEN WISHNIA

**T**he Philadelphia Housing Authority has agreed to turn 59 vacant buildings it owns over to a community land trust created by a group of homeless people, in exchange for them ending their months-long occupations of two vacant lots and 15 houses.

“As soon as our organization is ready, they’ll transfer the first 10,” says Jennifer Bennetch of OccupyPHA, one of the main organizers of the occupations. Philadelphia Housing Action, the umbrella coalition, has filed papers to incorporate the land trust, but details are still being worked out. Community land trusts own the land under the buildings, preventing it from being sold for a profit.

The occupations began in March, when groups of people, mostly mothers with children, began moving into vacant houses owned by the city’s public-housing authority, eventually occupying 15. In June, scores of homeless people set up two encampments demanding permanent housing — one on Ben Franklin Parkway, the boulevard leading to the city’s art museums, and a smaller one in the Sharswood neighborhood, across the street from the Philadelphia Housing Authority’s headquarters.

In a deal announced Sept. 25, the housing authority agreed to turn over 50 buildings to the land trust. On Oct. 5, it agreed to turn over nine more on a block near the Sharswood encampment, “Camp Teddy,” in exchange for the occupiers immediately leaving. Construction of a shopping center and a 98-apartment complex on that site was scheduled to start the next week.

The 59 buildings in the deal are generally two to four stories tall, with two to six bedrooms, Philadelphia Housing Authority CEO Kelvin Jeremiah told *The Independent*. Most were acquired by the authority after being abandoned, have been vacant for 40 to 60 years and “are not livable in their current form,” he adds. They were slated to be turned over to private developers under the Rental Assistance Demonstration program, an Obama-era initiative that allows public-housing authorities to cut deals with private entities in order to finance renovating or replacing buildings.

The 15 houses occupied by families will not be included in the deal, because the authority had already planned to rent them to new tenants, says Jeremiah. The occupiers, who picked those houses because they didn’t need much work to make them habitable, will get a choice of staying in them as public-housing tenants or moving to other public-housing units.

The Camp Teddy occupiers liked the block the nine houses are on, but “they needed more work than we were able to do,” says Bennetch. But as part of the deal, the housing au-

thority and the Philadelphia Building and Construction Trades Council will create a program in which homeless people will get jobs and training working on the renovations.

The building-trades unions had about 200 jobs riding on the Sharswood complex. “We had a \$52 million community-revitalization project that was on the brink of collapsing,” says Jeremiah. “I could not deliver the site unencumbered. That enabled us to have an amicable discussion.”

Many crucial details remain unresolved, particularly how to pay for the renovation work, who will get to live in the houses and how to administer and maintain them. Philadelphia Housing Action had demanded that the houses be designated for “extremely low-income” people — about \$20,300 for a single person and \$26,000 for a family of three under federal standards for the area. The occupiers will need to get insurance and licenses for the property before it will be transferred, says Jeremiah.

Most of the houses will go to people involved in the occupation, says Bennetch, with some people wanting to live together in groups and some sentiment to give women, the elderly and disabled first priority. She doesn’t want it to be “like we’re just throwing people in houses.”

“We built community all summer,” she says. “We want to keep that together.”

### MAJOR COSTS

The Philadelphia occupiers “need to be given credit,” says Valerio Orselli of This Land Is Ours, a Lower East Side-based land trust. But, he adds, they will also need public financial support and advice on management from experienced experts.

Taking over buildings in bad shape “requires major costs” to repair plumbing, wiring and roofs, he explains — a lesson he learned in the 1980s and 1990s, when he was head of the Cooper Square Committee, which was then putting together a 22-building community land trust on the Lower East Side.

Community land trusts ensure long-term affordability, especially when combined with a mutual housing association to manage the buildings, Orselli says. They also can operate more sustainably than individual buildings, by buying things like fuel collectively, having a common reserve fund for major repairs and sharing rents from commercial space.

There are about 15 in the five boroughs now, according to the NYC Community Land Initiative, a coalition of land-trust groups and supportive organizations. Most are in Manhattan and the Bronx.

“I’m actually very excited by the Philadelphia model,” says Sandra Lobo, executive director of the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition (NWBCCC), which is trying to assemble 28 sites for a pilot community land trust in the Fordham Road area, from University Heights to Belmont.

Transferring land to community ownership, she says, is “a must, given that neighborhoods like ours are experiencing serious displacement pressures, heading into a homelessness crisis and are reaching record unemployment rates.”

For-profit development, she adds, simply can’t deliver the low rents people need. Mayor Bill de Blasio’s affordable-housing program, which relies on leveraging trickle-down from luxury development, can’t provide

apartments for people making much less than \$50,000 a year without public rent subsidies. That is more than twice the median income in some Bronx neighborhoods.

Nonprofit development can provide somewhat lower rents, Lobo says, but collective ownership will give tenants a voice in planning their communities, such as on rezoning.

The biggest obstacles to expanding land trusts in the city are money and that there is not much available land.

“I think community land trusts can be a really valuable model, but I don’t see it scaling up to thousands of units,” says Steve Herrick, the Cooper Square Committee’s current executive director. “The horse is out of the barn, because the city gave away so many buildings.”

The city now owns less than 1,000 buildings, and maybe three are on the Lower East Side, he says. In the 1980s and 1990s, it had taken over thousands of abandoned buildings, but sold many to developers or moved them into programs where affordability requirements expired after 20 or 30 years.

Philadelphia, whose population has declined by 20 percent since 1960, is widely perceived as having more vacant properties available. But the housing authority owns only about 300 to 400 abandoned houses, says Jeremiah. (The Philadelphia mayor’s press office did not respond to a question about how many vacant properties the city itself owns.)

The 28 city-owned sites NWBCCC is seeking are a mix of in-use residential buildings, empty lots and mixed-use vacant buildings, says Lobo. The city often sells buildings it seizes for tax debts or unsafe conditions to the highest bidder, she adds, and “we believe they should be turned over to the communities facing displacement.”

This Land Is Ours, which is putting together a four-building community land trust in East Harlem, is also looking at decommissioned church properties. It offered \$18.5 million for a former Catholic church at 44 Second Ave., but the Archdiocese of New York sold it to a real-estate investment firm in March for \$40 million.

Another source is HDFCs, which are former city-owned buildings converted to co-ops that can’t be sold for a profit. Many are “becoming financially unviable,” Orselli says, for reasons such as not being able to afford major repairs. NWBCCC has committed to bringing two HDFC buildings into its community land trust. Cooper Square added two last year.

Financing, however, “is even scarcer” than it was in the ’90s, Orselli says. Cooper Square was able to fix up its collection of aging tenements because it got forgivable loans, which aren’t available any more.

“The only way to supply permanent housing for the lowest incomes is not to rely on loans that have to be repaid,” he says. But in the long run, he adds, it would be cheaper for the city to spend money building that housing than to pay \$4,000-5,000 a month to keep homeless people in hotels.

“Our vision is that everybody in the Bronx is living in a building that has some kind of collective ownership and collective decision-making,” says Sandra Lobo.

**MAKING A DEMAND:** A member of Philadelphia Housing Action speaks at a press conference and rally. The city recently ceded 59 vacant buildings to the group for a community land trust.





ERIK RIST

# VOTE BIDEN/ HARRIS ON THE WFP BALLOT LINE

## DUMP TRUMP AND PROTECT PROGRESSIVE POWER IN NY AT THE SAME TIME

BY JULIA SALAZAR & JABARI BRISPORT

On March 8, we (State Sen. Julia Salazar and State Senator-elect Jabari Brisport) spoke at a massive canvass for Bernie Sanders, where hundreds of socialist volunteers knocked on thousands of doors to spread a democratic socialist vision for our country. We were proud to support a fantastic candidate who believed in a political revolution that would restructure our society around the needs of the many, not the few. Sadly, Bernie will not be our next president. But here in New York, we have a real opportunity to keep doing the organizing that can make a better world possible: by voting for Joe Biden and Kamala Harris specifically on the Working Families Party line.

When we each ran for State Senate, the Democratic establishment supported our opponents — but the Working Families Party had our backs. That's because for over 20 years, the WFP has stood up for working people's champions running for the New York State Legislature and fought for true progressive power in Albany. So it's no surprise that Gov. Andrew Cuomo and the corporate Democratic establishment are now trying to take away the Working Families Party's ballot line and weaken progressive power.

We can't let that happen — that's why we're voting for Biden and Harris on the Working Families Party ballot line, and you should too.

For decades, Albany was controlled by Republicans and corporate Democrats who worked hand in hand to empower themselves, rather than working people. The Working Families Party spent years campaigning to send working people's champions to Albany — leaders like State Sen. Gustavo Rivera in the Bronx, Assemblymember Yuh-Line Niou in Manhattan and Assemblymember Diana Richardson in Brooklyn. And in a historic power shift in Albany in 2018, the WFP recruited, supported and elected a slate of candidates who unseated the Independent Democratic Conference and their corporate allies — flipping the State Senate blue for the first time in eight years and kicking off the most progressive legislative session in New York history.

While establishment Democrats refused to endorse that slate of progressive champions — Jessica Ramos, Alessandra Biaggi, Robert Jackson, Rachel May, John Liu, Zellnor Myrie (and me, Julia Salazar) — the WFP was in the trenches. The WFP built campaign plans, recruited volunteers and brought in the grassroots support and progressive muscle we needed to win.

Because of the Working Families Party, the State Senate was able to push through massive progressive wins in 2019 that had been bottlenecked by Republican control for years: from historic tenant protections and voter access laws to landmark climate legislation and driver's licenses for undocumented immigrants. And that same year, the WFP invested heavily in Tiffany Cabán's decarceral dis-

JULIA SALAZAR

JABARI BRISPORT

trict attorney campaign. This cycle, the WFP continued to back progressives like myself, Jabari Brisport, Marcela Mitaynes, Khaleel Anderson and dozens more.

So it's no surprise that Gov. Cuomo and his corporate allies have been laser-focused on weakening the Working Families Party — the party that wrested control away from the governor and his Republican allies and began to truly deliver for working people. During this year's budget negotiations amid a pandemic, the governor slipped in an eleventh-hour clause requiring all political parties to meet the strictest

ballot requirements in the nation to maintain their ballot line. Parties once needed 50,000 votes every four years to maintain their ballot line. Now, they need 130,000 votes or 2% of all votes — whichever is higher — at the top of the ticket and they need these votes every two years, starting now. The threshold and timing were clearly meant to hurt the WFP this year, during a presidential election with very high turnout.

It's clearer than ever why we must work to protect the Working Families Party's ballot line: if not for the WFP, Democrats might be still battling with Republicans for control of the statehouse. Instead, GOP legislators are dropping like flies, corporate Democrats are on the defensive and the left is building real power in Albany.

We will both be voting on the WFP line, because we cannot let Gov. Cuomo and his fellow corporate Democrats weaken our progressive power in the middle of the political fight of our lives. New York is in the midst of a massive public health crisis, while suffering the effects of decades of austerity budgets and racist police brutality. We need to build working people's power in Albany — and the WFP plays a key role in that fight.

Tens of thousands of our loved ones have died because of the state's crumbling health-care system; millions are at risk of eviction; too many to count cannot afford to feed their families. Unemployment claims are climbing, and New York and Washington have left our undocumented brothers and sisters out to dry. If Gov. Cuomo has his way, New York will continue cutting funding for hospitals, schools and localities instead of asking the wealthy to pay more so we can all survive. We can't afford a weakened left right now. By voting for Biden and Harris as well as candidates like us on the WFP line, you can help protect the ballot line — and protect the multiracial, people-powered movement for justice that this moment demands.

For those of us who believe in a truly progressive agenda, voting for this year's Democratic presidential ticket is not going to be easy; Biden and Harris are far from the working people's champions that this moment deserves. But we also know that we can and must use our ballot to vote against Trump and to vote to strengthen progressive power in New York, by voting for Biden and Harris on the WFP line. To win, we need to keep progressive power growing in New York — so join us, and vote for Biden and Harris on the WFP line.

*A version of this op ed originally appeared in Gotham Gazette. State Sen. Julia Salazar represents parts of Brooklyn in the 18th District and is running for reelection. Jabari Brisport is the Democratic and WFP nominee for Brooklyn's 25th State Senate District. On Twitter @JuliaCarmel\_ and @JabariBrisport.*







COURTESY

# VOTE GREEN TO SAVE LIFE ON THIS PLANET

BY MARK DUNLEA

**W**e need to remove Trump from the White House. We also need to be clear that Joe Biden is not the solution to the critical problems facing America or New York.

There is one independent party on the ballot in New York that embraces a progressive agenda — the Green Party — and we need your vote on Election Day for Howie Hawkins for president, both to send a message to the two corporate parties but also to allow the Green Party to survive the efforts by the Democrats to kill us.

The Greens inaugurated the call for a Green New Deal and a ban on fracking in 2010, with a 10-year timeframe to end carbon emissions combined with an economic bill of rights. We have, for decades, advocated expanded, improved Medicare-for-All. In our first statewide race in 1998, we demanded an end to the war on drugs and mass incarceration, plus justice for Palestinians. For decades we have championed LGBTQAI rights; the Green mayor in New Paltz began performing same-sex marriages in 2004, which helped inspire the national movement. We were the first party calling for a \$15/hour minimum wage.

Green Party positions are broadly popular: we embrace Eco-Socialism and call for public ownership and democratic control over our economy. The party has long advocated taxing the rich, slashing the military budget by at least 75%, a guaranteed living wage for all and universal basic income, and defunding the police.

Trump must be removed. He has called for a race war in the United States. He is openly promoting fascism.

Trump is not an aberration. He is the product of 40 years of increasing corporate

power in America. He is a con man, aided and abetted by mainstream media. The corporations bankroll both major parties.

When the Democrats finally regained control of both houses of the New York state legislature, they used their power to pass laws to kill independent alternative parties.

The founding fathers restricted the right to vote to rich, white males. They created the Electoral College to increase the power of the slave states, a goal it still accomplishes. The vast majority of Americans have no say in electing a president since it is clear which party will win the electoral votes in their state. In New York, the Democrats will win by 3 million votes. That frees New Yorkers to vote their beliefs rather than their fears, to act as if we live in a democracy.

New York progressives will also hear appeals from the Working Families Party for their vote. The WFP is primarily a Democratic Party club, running some candidates in primaries to try to push the Democrats to the left. This has not been effective, especially their decision to back Andrew Cuomo for governor twice, as well as members of the Independent Democratic Conference who allied themselves for years with the Republicans who controlled the State Senate. The Greens are consistently decades ahead of the WFP in promoting progressive issues. All the WFP needs to do is convince a few percent of New York's 5 million Biden voters to vote on the WFP line.

The Green Party needs the vote of progressives who want a different world and who have the courage to stand up to the two corporate parties. While the Greens need at least 170,000 votes to continue to exist in New York, we also need as large a vote as possible against the corporate agendas of both Trump and Biden.

The climate crisis is the greatest threat to humanity and our fellow inhabitants of the planet. Biden is calling for a 30-year timeline to get to "net zero emissions," which means allowing fossil fuels to be burnt via "carbon capture" technology. Biden's climate agenda is a death warrant for life on the planet as we know it.

We need to remove Trump and fight Biden. In New York, we can do both by voting for the Green Party's Howie Hawkins and Angela Walker for President and Vice-President.

*Mark Dunlea is a co-founder of the Green Party of New York and its 2018 candidate for state comptroller.*

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# DEMOCRACY IN PERIL

## TRUMP'S BLUEPRINT FOR STEALING A SECOND TERM

By JOHN TARLETON

On Oct. 8, 13 far-right extremists were indicted by federal and state authorities for plotting to kidnap Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, put her on trial and execute her. Whitmer, a moderate Democrat, was elected two years ago following eight years of Republican misrule that saw tax cuts for the rich and poisoned water for the people of Flint.

Trump quickly went on the attack denouncing Whitmer. At an Oct. 17 campaign rally in Muskegon, Michigan, he led a crowd of thousands in “Lock her up!” chants directed at the governor.

Like so many other Trump-era outrages, the Whitmer kidnapping plot has faded into the background as one shocking new incident surpasses another. Yet with Election Day fast approaching and concerns growing about what will follow it, the Whitmer incident is worth keeping in mind.

The actions of the Michigan coup plotters were an outlier even by Trump-era standards. But this incident speaks to a larger trend that is now commonplace in Republican circles: A contempt for democracy and a refusal to accept election results that don't go their way. The playing field is already tilted in their favor (see below) thanks to a Constitution composed 230 years ago by wealthy merchants and slave owners.

The Republican Party has been trending in an increasingly anti-democratic direction over the past 20 years or more. And at this point, they are barely trying to hide it. During the Oct. 7 vice presidential debate, Utah Senator Mike Lee smugly tweeted, “We're not a democracy.”

But would the Republicans really go all the way and blow up the imperfect democracy we still have to install Trump in the White House for a second term?

The temptation will certainly be there. Trump will likely hold a large lead in the national vote on Election Night as well as in several key swing states due to the preference of pandemic-wary Democrats for mail-in voting. The prospect of the Republicans jumping out to an early lead is referred to as the “red mirage.”

Trump will almost certainly try to use the red mirage on Election Night to claim an overwhelming victory while disparaging millions of still-to-be-counted mail-in ballots as fraudulent, as he has been claiming for months. Large parts of the right-wing media echo chamber will likely amplify his message.

If fast-counting swing states such as Florida, North Carolina and Texas flip for Biden on election night, Trump will be headed for a landslide defeat that he and his diehard supporters will find difficult to overturn. But what if Republican voter suppression efforts (or a runaway pandemic) drive down voter turnout in big cities such as Philadelphia, Phoenix, Detroit and Milwaukee that are crucial to beating Trump in key swing states? Or, what if court challenges lead to large numbers of mail-in votes being held in legal limbo or disqualified?

The much-anticipated “blue shift” that is expected to come with the counting of mail-in votes could be short-circuited. From there, things could get messy fast.

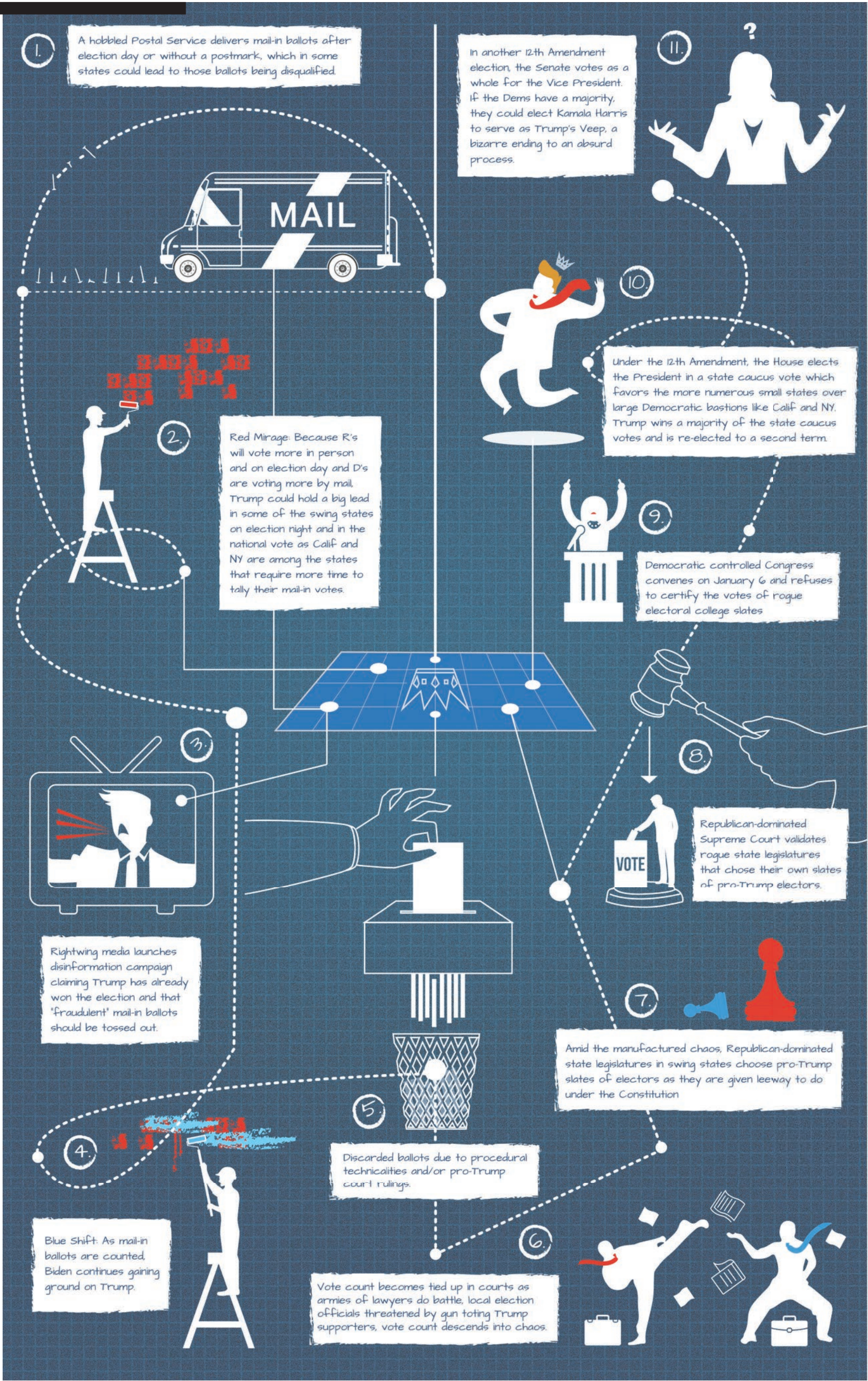
Should this happen, a broad-based mobilization of anti-Trump forces that goes far beyond the usual suspects would need to take to the streets quickly and persist for as long as necessary (see pages 12-13). Counting on the legal system alone would be folly.

Still, it helps to understand the constitutional processes that could unfold and how the Republicans have gamed the counter-majoritarian features of our nation's founding document to their benefit. These advantages could be deployed to give Trump a narrow but clear path to a “victory” that would convulse this country like few events in its history. Here's a rough blueprint.

**ELECTORAL COLLEGE:** Each state's number of electors is equal to the number of its congressional seats plus its two Senate seats. This gives greater weight to sparsely populated rural states. Worse, the half dozen or so “swing states” that will decide who wins an Electoral College majority are more conservative than the population as a whole. This is becoming more pronounced over time. In 2000, George W. Bush lost the popular vote by a half a point but won the Electoral College by 271-266 over Democrat Al Gore. Hillary Clinton won the popular vote in 2016 by 2.2 percent and lost the Electoral College 304-227. This time around it appears Joe Biden will need to carry the national vote by around four to five points to avoid Hillary's fate in the swing states — and that's before any vote suppressing shenanigans begin. A week out from Election Day, Biden's lead in the national polls hovers between seven to nine points.

**SUPREME COURT:** This is the single most anti-democratic institution in our society. In December 2000, five Republican-appointed justices shut down Florida's recount in *Bush v. Gore*, handing Bush a 537-vote victory in the Sunshine State and the keys to the White House. As president, Bush would later firm up the court's conservative strength by appointing Chief Justice John Roberts and Justice Samuel Alito. They in turn have provided key votes in a series of 5-4 verdicts that have gutted the Voting Rights Act, overturned campaign finance laws, validated Republican-backed voter suppression laws purporting to address the non-existent threat of voter fraud, refused to bar gerrymandering and have been sympathetic to GOP efforts to make it harder for people to vote during a pandemic. With Amy Coney Barrett joining the court a week before Election Day, the court's right-wing tilt has become even more pronounced.

**SENATE:** The equal representation rule enshrined in the Constitution gives each state two senators, which once again favors sparsely populated rural states that lean more conservative than the country as a whole. The 50 senators who voted in 2018 to confirm Brett Kavanaugh to a lifetime seat on the Supreme Court represent 44 percent of the people in this country. These days Senate Republicans can't be bothered to pass a second coronavirus relief package while millions of Americans slide into poverty. But, they have used their numerical advantage to stuff the federal courts with 200 young right-wing ideologues who will be around



for decades thanks to the lifetime appointments conferred by the Constitution.

**STATE LEGISLATURES:** While voters troop to the polls to decide which candidate will receive their states' electoral votes, Article II, Section 1, Clause 2 of the Constitution gives state legislatures the power to decide who will receive a state's electoral college votes. No state legislature has chosen a slate of electors since the 19th century. However, the Republican-dominated Florida state legislature was prepared to do so in December 2000 if the Supreme Court had not intervened in Bush's favor. If Trump and his supporters manage to create enough uncertainty about the election's outcome, lame duck Republican-dominated legislatures could step in to resolve the matter to their liking. In Pennsylvania, three top leaders of the state's Republican Party told *The Atlantic's* Barton Gelman that they had discussed direct appointment of electors.

**REDISTRICTING:** So how is it the Republicans control the state legislatures in the major swing states when they got wiped out in the “Blue Wave” election of 2018? Back in 2010, the Republicans won big across the country riding a wave of anti-Obama sentiment. This coincided with the once-a-decade practice of redrawing legislative districts based on Census results.

In state after state, the Republicans remade the electoral map to pack as many Democrats into as few districts as possible. Known as gerrymandering, this practice dates back more than 200 years. But where once it was a rough art, the Republicans have since turned it into a science using the latest high-tech tools to guide their scalpel. For example, Wisconsin Democrats swept all their statewide races in 2018 while their State Assembly candidates received 53 percent of the total vote in those races. However, the Democrats only won 36 of 99 Assembly seats.

**CONTINGENT ELECTION PART 1:** Congress has the final say in a presidential contest. When the new Congress convenes in early January, it will meet in a joint session to certify the Electoral College results. This is normally a formality. But if the Democrats hold the majority, they could reject electoral college slates chosen by Republican state legislatures. If no candidate wins an electoral college majority, the election would then be decided by the House of Representatives. This is known as a contingent election. It would seem like a slam dunk for the Dems given their clear majority in the House. But, that would be too simple.

Under the 12th Amendment, the House would use a state caucus system that gives each state delegation one vote. There hasn't been a contingent election since 1824, when second place finisher John Quincy Adams prevailed. Thanks to their small state advantage plus the gerrymandering performed by Republican state legislatures, Republicans currently control 26 state delegations in the House, the Democrats control 23 and one state is equally divided. The outcomes of a handful of little-noticed House races this year could make the difference in which party controls the majority of state delegations and in turn decides whether Trump or Biden is the next president.

**CONTINGENT ELECTION PART 2:** Under the 12th Amendment, the vice presidency in a contingent election is decided by the Senate by majority vote. Depending on which party controls the Senate, Kamala Harris could be chosen as Donald Trump's vice president.

This all sounds like a fever dream, an alternate reality that surely we will never step into. There are level-headed voices that say the same.

Conservative *New York Times* columnist Russ Douthat says Trump yearns to be a strongman but is more of a “noisy weakling” than a tyrant in waiting. Writing in *The New Republic*, the Brennan

Center's Walter Shapiro argues that Trump's shock 2016 victory has left liberals and progressives mentally disordered and prone to anxiety about threats that don't exist.

Still, when was the last time the Republicans didn't push the rules as far as they possibly could to grab more power even if it defied any notion of fair play or respect for norms? Exactly.

For reasons of ego and personal legal jeopardy, Trump and his family have plenty of reasons to fight it out. His base of white grievance voters sees a rapidly changing country. They surely know that Trump's fluke 2016 victory gave them a chance to restore “the white man's republic” that won't likely come their way again. The Republican establishment will have its finger to the wind but would probably be okay with dumping Trump's legacy on Biden, with an eye toward scapegoating him for the hard times ahead and returning to power with a vengeance in 2022 and 2024 sans Trump.

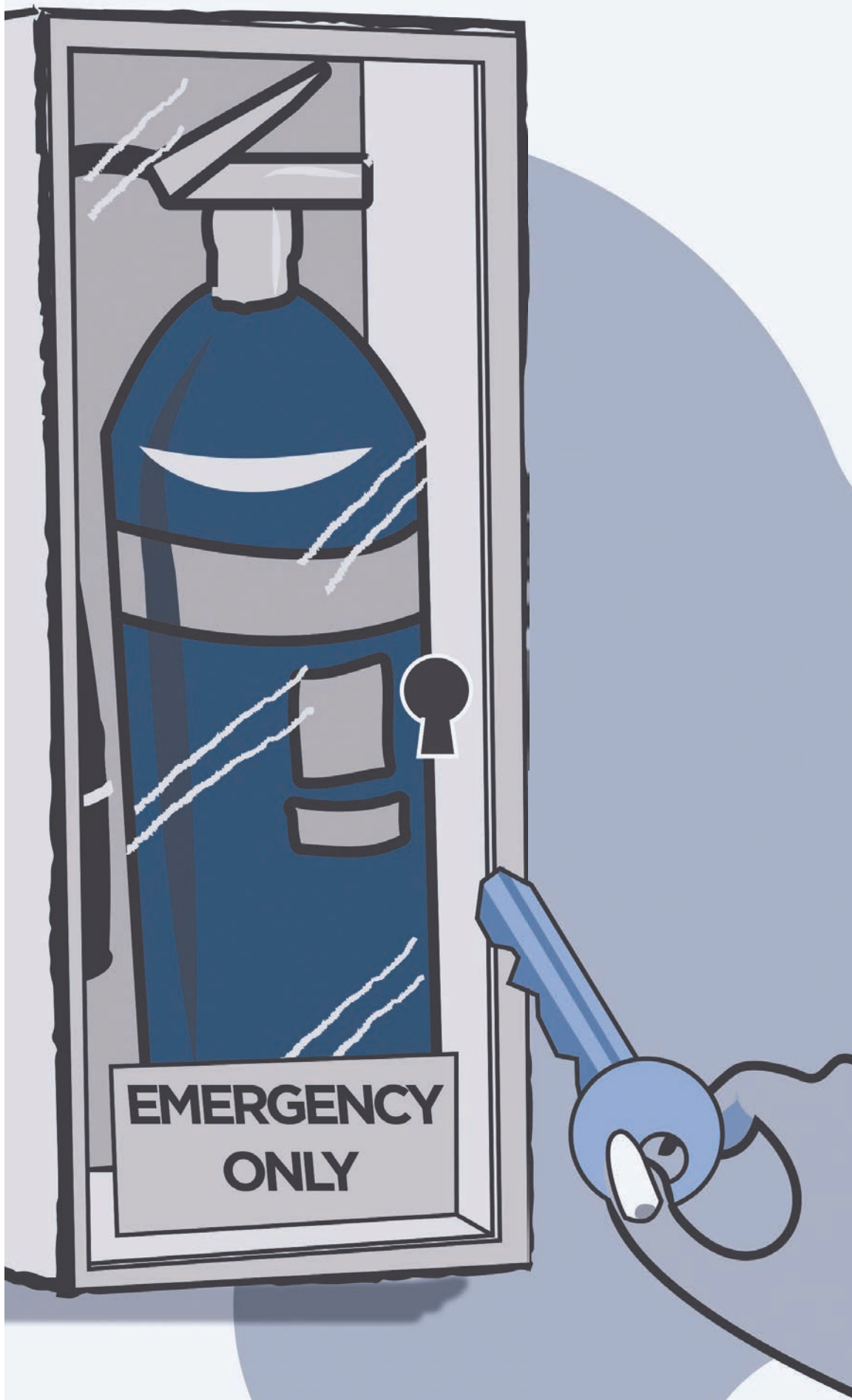
Should Biden and the Democrats prevail, they must move quickly or the power imbalances described above will reassert themselves before long and allow the Republicans to permanently lock in minority rule through their control of the Senate and the Supreme Court. Here's a quick action plan:

- GET RID OF THE SENATE FILIBUSTER (which isn't in the Constitution) and pass a major coronavirus economic relief package with a strong Green New Deal component that provides good-paying jobs to millions of out-of-work Americans.
- PASS A NEW VOTING RIGHTS ACT to replace the one that was eviscerated by the Supreme Court in 2013.
- ADD NEW STATES, starting with Washington, D.C. and Puerto Rico that would lean Democratic when voting for their U.S. senators.
- EXPAND THE SUPREME COURT by at least four seats. This will make a difference on many crucial issues, especially on voting rights. If left intact, a conservative Supreme Court majority will continue to devastate voting rights to the benefit of their GOP allies. The Constitution says nothing about how many Supremes there should be. Nine is just a long-standing norm. And we know how the Republicans feel about norms.

That's hard ball, the only game the Republicans understand or respect. There will be concern trolling about the importance of preserving bipartisan comity. But if a Biden administration takes a progressive turn (a big if, no doubt) and governs well for the large majority of people who want to see the government acting on their behalf during a crisis, Republican whining about “court packing” won't take them very far.

If given a chance in 2021 and they fail to act, the Democrats could make Mike Lee's taunt an irreversible reality. But first things first. Let's do what it takes to oust Trump and his gang from power. After that, new horizons will open up for us to run toward.





# 10 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW TO STOP A COUP

BY DANIEL HUNTER

**W**e have a president who has openly said he might not respect the outcome of our election. We have to be ready if he claims victory before votes are counted, tries to stop counting or refuses to accept a loss.

Some days I feel confident it will happen. Other days I feel confident this is tough talk from a president not good at planning ahead. Still, he is good at the kind of misdirection that can keep us complacent and reactionary — which could lead us to stop doing the important groundwork of getting out the vote, protecting the post office and fighting voter suppression.

So what I'm offering isn't asking us to stop what we're doing now. Instead I'm part of an effort called Choose Democracy, which is preparing people for the possibility of a coup while keeping people focused on a strong, robust election process. After all, the best way to stop a coup is to not have one.

These guidelines are drawn from the wide body of experience and evidence from the many countries that have experienced a coup since World War II. You can read some fuller case studies from Choose Democracy or a longer evidence-based handbook for this moment, "Hold the Line: A Guide to Defending Democracy."

## 1. DON'T EXPECT RESULTS ELECTION NIGHT

Election season 2020 is shaping up to be very unusual. Many mail-in ballots may not be counted until days or weeks after Election Day. Since Democrats are expected to use them more frequently than Republicans, voter tallies are expected to swing toward Democrats post-election night (they call it a "blue shift"). As a result, a wave of confusion may unfold starting election night.

The strange Electoral College creates multiple intervention points. After election night Nov. 3, trumped-up claims of fraudulent ballots may cause a wayward attorney general or other government officials to try halting counts or excluding ballots.

On Dec. 14, the delegates of the Electoral College meet and vote for each state's outcome. This is typically done without fanfare, but in contested states we might see governors and state legislatures sending in different results — one reflecting the results from voters, the other claiming "it's a fraud" and "we know best." This is worrying in swing states like Pennsylvania, where the governor and state legislature are of different parties.

All these issues would then get resolved on Jan. 6 by the new Congress. And if the House and Senate don't agree about the result, then a convoluted process unfolds where the newly seated House — via a one-state, one-vote — determines the president. Meanwhile, the Senate votes for the new vice president by majority.

During this time expect false flags and outlandish claims. Be very cautious with news. Don't simply pass on whatever seems like dramatic examples of wrongdoing — but take the time to check if it has been verified, already debunked or comes from a source you don't trust. Encourage people in your community to prepare for some uncertain weeks. As election results start coming in the message needs to come through loud and clear: Count all the votes, and honor the result.

## 2. DO CALL IT A COUP

One reason to use the language of a coup is that people know it's wrong and a violation of Democratic norms — even if they're not familiar with the exact definition of a coup.

Language like "election tampering" or "voter suppression" signal deterioration of the democratic process. But if we get ourselves into a coup situation — like where Trump just won't go — we need to help people help our country move into a psychic break.

We know it's a coup if the government:

- Stops counting votes;
- Declares someone a winner who didn't get the most votes; or
- Allows someone to stay in power who didn't win the election

These are sensible red lines that people can grasp right away (and that the majority of Americans continue to believe in).

People who do power grabs always claim they're doing it to save democracy or claim they know the "real" election results. So this doesn't have to



look like a military coup with one leader ordering the opposition to be arrested.

If any of those three principles are violated, we have to declare loudly and strongly: This is a coup.

### 3. KNOW THAT COUPS HAVE BEEN STOPPED BY REGULAR FOLKS.

Coup attempts have happened all over the world, and more than half have failed. That's because coups are hard to orchestrate. They are a violation of norms that require quick seizure of multiple levels of institutions with a claim that the people seizing them are the rightful heirs.

Coups tend to fail when government institutions like elections are trusted, there is an active citizenry and other nations are ready to become involved.

The role of citizenry is crucial. That's because during the period right after a coup attempt — when the new government is claiming it is the “real” government — all the institutions have to decide who to listen to. The moments after a coup are moments for heroism amongst the general population. It's how we make democracy real.

### 4. BE READY TO ACT QUICKLY — AND NOT ALONE.

Typically power grabs are organized in secret and launched suddenly. Most campaigns that defeat coups do so in days: The Soviet Union in 1991 took three days, France in 1961 took four days and Bolivia in 1978 took 16 days.

It's rare for any country's leader to publicly admit they might not respect the results of an election. There's some good news in that — because people who stop coups rarely have the chance to get training, warning or preparation. In that way, we're ahead of the game.

A group of D.C. insiders called the Transition Integrity Project ran multiple simulations, such as what might happen if Biden wins by a slim margin or if Trump simply declares victory when there's no clear winner. In every simulation they concluded that a “show of numbers in the streets may be decisive.” Regular people make the difference.

To start preparing, talk to at least five people who would go into the streets with you — the safest way to take to the streets is with people you know and trust. Talk to people you know in civil service and various roles about how they could non-comply with coup attempts. Use this time to get yourself ready to act.

### 5. FOCUS ON WIDELY SHARED DEMOCRATIC VALUES, NOT ON INDIVIDUALS.

In Argentina in 1987, a coup got started when an Air Force major, resenting attempts to democratize the military and bring it under civilian control, organized hundreds of soldiers at his base.

While the civilian government tried to quietly negotiate a settlement, people took to the streets. Against the government's pleading, 500 regular citizens marched to the base with the slogan “Long live democracy! Argentina! Argentina!” They could have spent time attacking the major. Instead, they were appealing to their fellow citizens to choose democracy.

The major tried to keep them away with a tank, but the protesters entered the base anyway, and he knew that open firing on nonviolent civilians would cause him to lose more credibility. Soon 400,000 people took to the streets in Buenos Aires to rally in opposition to the coup.

This gave strength to the civilian government, which had largely been absent. Civic organizations, the Catholic church, business groups and labor unions united under a pledge to “support in all ways possible the constitution, the normal development of the institutions of government and democracy as the only viable way of life.” The coup plotters lost their legitimacy and soon surrendered.

This approach is different than protesters going into the streets with a list of issues or a grievance against a vilified lead-

er. Instead, it's exalting widely-shared core democratic values. In our project we use the language of “choosing democracy.”

This affirms another finding from the research on anti-coups: Because coups are an attack on the current institution, loyalists to the traditional way — who may never join other movement causes — are open to joining actions in the street. That's if we make the invitation about democratic values they can connect with.

### 6. CONVINCE PEOPLE NOT TO FREEZE OR JUST GO ALONG.

Imagine that at your job a corrupt boss gets fired and a new one is brought in. Instead of leaving, your old boss says, “I'm still in charge. Do what I say.” A bunch of your co-workers say, “We only take orders from the old boss.” At that point, doubt arises.

That doubt is how coups succeed. Enough people freeze. Even when only a few people go along with the coup and act as though that's normal, people may reluctantly accept it as inevitable.

In all the research on preventing coups, there's one common theme: People stop doing what the coup plotters tell them to do.

In Germany, from military commanders to secretaries, they refused to obey the orders of the coup. In Mali they called a nationwide strike. In Sudan protesters shut down government-supported radio stations and occupied airport runways. In Venezuela all shops were closed.

This is very different than mass marches at the capital or street protests shutting down intersections. It's not about protest but about getting people to reassert core values — like

## IN ALL THE RESEARCH ON PREVENTING COUPS, THERE'S ONE COMMON THEME: PEOPLE STOP DOING WHAT THE COUP PLOTTERS TELL THEM TO DO.

showing up at elected officials' offices to get them to agree to honor election results. And it's not about single points of actions like marches in D.C. — but instead actions like mass strikes from youth and students refusing to go to work or school until all votes are counted.

Coups are not a time to just watch and wait until “someone else” figures it out. No matter who you are, you can be a part of choosing democracy.

### 7. COMMIT TO ACTIONS THAT REPRESENT RULE OF LAW, STABILITY AND NONVIOLENCE.

Stopping a coup is dependent on the size of mobilizations and winning over the center. It is really a fight for legitimacy. Which voice is legitimate? Some people will have already made up their minds. The aim, then, is convincing those who are uncertain — which may be a more surprising number than you expect.

To swing them to our side, that uncertain center has to be convinced that “we” represent stability and “the coup plotters” represent hostility to the democratic norms of elections and voting.

We prevent that possibility when we dehumanize potential defectors, make sweeping statements like “the police won't help,” never encourage people to join our side and create chaotic scenes on the street.

Historically, whichever side resorts to violence the most tends to lose. Mass resistance to coups wins by using walk-outs and strikes, refusing orders and shutting down civil society until the rightful, democratically-elected leader is installed. For mass movements to succeed against coups, they should refuse to do violence to the other side.

### 8. YES, A COUP CAN HAPPEN IN THE UNITED STATES.

It may be hard to imagine that a coup could happen in this country. But whenever there is an order to stop counting votes, we call it a coup.

Even by the strictest definition of coups, there has been a militarized coup in the United States. In 1898 after Reconstruction in Wilmington, North Carolina, seeing the rise of a prosperous and successful Black population, white racists organized a coup. They gave rallying cries like, “We will never surrender to a ragged raffle of Negroes, even if we have to choke the Cape Fear River with carcasses.”

Despite a terror campaign before the election, Black turnout was high and a slate of Black candidates was voted in. Black power was met with white supremacist violence, with white death squads killing 30 to 300 people, including newly elected officials. Over 3,000 Blacks fled this extreme violence, and the era of Jim Crow began.

### 9. CENTER IN CALM, NOT FEAR.

It's scary to believe we're having to talk about a federal coup in the United States. And we know that fearful people are less likely to make good decisions.

Let's aim for calm and avoid hyperbole. Be a reliable source by double-checking rumors and spreading high-quality facts. Sure, read social media... but spend some time, you know, doing real things that ground you.

Breathe deeply.

Remember how you handle fear.

Play out scenarios, but don't become captured by them.

We're doing this to prepare, just in case.

### 10. PREPARE TO DETER A COUP BEFORE THE ELECTION.

The best way to stop a coup is to never have one. People are doing lots of good work on issues of voting rights, urging turnout, stopping repression, uncovering fraud and getting people to commit to democracy. That may be enough.

Another way to prepare is to get people into the mindset of taking action so they don't freeze. The classic formulation of this is the “if-this-then-that” model. In that model people prepare themselves for an action by saying “If it comes to this bad

thing, then I'll act.” By signing a pledge before the crunch moment, you get wider buy-in.

In that spirit, Choose Democracy has created a pledge:

1. *We will vote.*
2. *We will refuse to accept election results until all the votes are counted.*
3. *We will nonviolently take to the streets if a coup is attempted.*
4. *If we need to, we will shut down this country to protect the integrity of the democratic process.*

You can sign the pledge at [choosedemocracy.us](https://choosedemocracy.us) and join with folks across the political spectrum! These public commitments ahead of time increase the political cost of attempting a coup — because the best way to stop a coup is to deter it.

*A longer version of this article first appeared at [Waging-nonviolence.org](https://waging-nonviolence.org). Daniel Hunter is the Global Trainings Manager at [350.org](https://350.org) and a curriculum designer with Sunrise Movement. He has written multiple books, including *Climate Resistance Handbook* and *Building a Movement to End the New Jim Crow*.*



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### SOCIAL MOVEMENTS



## 'I VOTED' ISN'T ENOUGH

BY DANNY KATCH

For all of the catastrophic low points of Donald Trump's time in office — praising murderous Nazis in Charlottesville, happily tossing paper towel rolls in hurricane-ravaged Puerto Rico, promoting bleach injection as COVID protection — the most unbearable aspect of his presidency on a daily basis has been his unending assault on our ability to have a sustained thought.

Like a car alarm blaring day and night, Trump's alternating sirens of fear and hate, ignorance and cruelty — broadcast across all of our screens and intruding into almost every conversation with family and friends — has made it impossible to focus on anything beyond just stopping this awful noise.

So it's understandable that for many progressives in these final days of Trump's first, and hopefully only, term, voting him out is the one and only priority. We may recognize that our present crisis has roots in the racism, inequality, and failing healthcare systems that came long before 2016, but it feels like we can only take those issues on after Nov. 3, because if Trump wins, there's no telling what chaos and tyranny might ensue.

Unfortunately, it's becoming clearer by the day that even if Trump doesn't win, there's no telling what chaos and tyranny might ensue. The false claims coming from the White House about voter fraud have ensured that millions of Republicans — including heavily armed white nationalists — will view any result other than a Trump reelection as illegitimate.

What this means is that the old activist adage about voting one day and organizing on the other 364 needs to be updated. Even on Election Day itself, we need to be prepared to do much more than vote in order to defend our democratic rights.

But even if Trump is defeated and forced to concede, the current dynamic of a two-party system — where one party has ceded the wheel to a motley crew of zealots and cranks, while the other remains tightly controlled by bipartisan centrists — cannot resolve the multiple crises we face.

For starters, it's not idle speculation to assume that Republicans will try to sabotage a Biden presidency with the less dramatic but perhaps more destructive tactic of sabotaging an economic recovery. In case they lose control of the Senate, they will be aided by an even more reactionary Supreme Court bolstered by Republicans' shameless 12th-hour addition of Amy Coney Barrett.

So regardless of how this chaotic election turns out, it's important that hundreds of thousands of the people who have been organizing against Trump understand that their role in the political process is not limited to voting, and that's where the signs are more hopeful.

...



THE GOOD NEWS FROM THE PAST FOUR YEARS is in the grassroots movements that have arisen to challenge both Trump and the lukewarm resistance put up to him by Democratic leaders.

Most attention typically goes to the inspiring insurgent electoral campaigns of Bernie Sanders, Alexandria Ocasio Cortez, Ilhan Omar and others who have helped push left-wing ideas into congressional halls and corporate media coverage that had previously only allowed debates between centrists and conservatives.

But as news coverage during election season narrows exclusively to candidate coverage, it's easy to forget that the most significant and successful opposition to Trump over the past four years has come not from politicians or the "deep state," but from millions of people who have partaken in some of the largest and boldest protests and job actions this country has seen in decades.

From the historically large Women's Marches on the first day of Trump's presidency to the even larger Black Lives Matter protests of the past summer, mass protests have countered the far right's infiltration of government agencies with a counter-infiltration of popular culture, turning movie sets, football locker rooms, and TikTok threads into forums for organizing against rape, police murders and presidential rallies.

Crucially, and for the first time in generations, these struggles breached the gates of the repressive American workplace — most spectacularly with the wave of teachers strikes that have rolled back budget cuts and privatization schemes and in certain cities established the strike as a tool for fighting deportations and anti-Black racism.

Then there have been auspicious job actions in a number of critical nonunionized industries. Five-hundred Microsoft employees signed a petition protesting their company's contract with Immigration and Customs Enforcement, while Google employees held a historic global walkout against mishandled sexual assault complaints. More recently, small but impactful rallies, walkouts, and petitions have demanded and sometimes helped win hazard pay and PPE from companies like Amazon, Instacart and Trader Joe's.

There is of course no need to counterpose voting and protesting, and if Donald Trump's opponent were Bernie Sanders or another figure associated with these movements, that would be doubly true. But the Biden campaign is spending the final weeks of the campaign promising voters that he will reject progressive demands; "Joe Biden will not ban fracking," was Kamala Harris's most repeated talking point during the vice-presidential debate.

In these circumstances, silencing our criticisms of Biden and halting other organizing under the rationale that voting out Trump is "all that matters" runs the risk of setting back the progress that the left has made in advancing working-class demands like Medicare For All, which Biden has vowed to veto.

This election is truly important. But if we want to address the nightmares created in the Trump era, we have to find the ability to focus on more than one thing, even as the car alarm blares louder than ever in the days leading up to Nov. 3. That means continuing to build the organizations and movements for the world we rightfully want, and not just limiting ourselves to casting a vote against what we rightfully fear.



# MIGRANTS FACE UNCERTAIN FUTURE

## BEST AND WORST OF THE HUMAN SPIRIT CAN BE FOUND IN TEX-MEX BORDER REGION DEMONIZED BY TRUMP

BY ERIN SHERIDAN

BROWNSVILLE, TEXAS — The lower Rio Grande Valley, the border between Texas and Mexico, marks the end of the shortest path between Central America and the United States. And Brownsville, a city of 183,000 people at its easternmost edge, has become a crisis zone, as thousands of Central Americans fleeing for their lives have been stalled at the border by the Trump administration's racist and inhumane immigration policies.

A Brownsville resident who has a good-paying full-time job, legal status and fluency in both Spanish and English might tell you there isn't a crisis, but the metropolitan area's poverty rate is nearly 30% — the highest in the country outside of Puerto Rico. Unincorporated colonias dot the city's edges. Many of the wooden houses are built by hand. I often see men and women carrying groceries across U.S. Highway 77 in oppressive afternoon heat.

On March 20, Trump administration officials used a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention order to shut down the entire U.S.-Mexico border, and with it the asylum system. Customs and Border Patrol statistics indicate approximately 150,000 people, including an estimated 9,000 children, have been expelled under that order.

When I arrived in October 2019, approximately 1,500 refugees were living in tents on a dirt levee in Matamoros, Tamaulipas, just over the Gateway International Bridge. That number quickly swelled to nearly 3,000, although it shrank after the COVID-19 epidemic hit. Mexican immigration officials and shelter workers began telling families they would not win asylum, and suggested that they board buses south to Tapachula, Chiapas, on the border with Guatemala.

Locals, many of whom are Hispanic and of Mexican heritage, work for CBP and ICE. In February I watched one local man, a CBP press officer, stand with his colleagues laughing as a woman in her fifties seeking asylum lay on the ground a few feet south of the international line, gasping for air. She was having an asthma attack. The CBP officers did not cross the invisible line and instead continued to converse among themselves. The woman's attorney called for help. Volunteer doctors ran up to the bridge from the refugee camp and brought the woman on the concrete to safety.

THE REMAIN IN MEXICO PROGRAM grants exceptions to anyone with a serious health issue. But CBP officials without medical qualifications routinely deny them orally, with no written decision attorneys can question. Immigration lawyers stand on the bridge with sick children for hours, waiting for CBP to bring its physician to evaluate them. Sometimes in dangerous heat, sometimes in freezing winter rain. One told me that a boy who was finally allowed in after a two-hour wait last winter suffered a burst appendix in the ambulance on the way to the hospital in Brownsville.

Prior to the pandemic, new arrivals to the camp would pitch their tents and ask Mexican officials to put their names on "the list." Some of the officials won't without an adequate bribe. Now, the camp is fenced off by Mexican authorities. Before hearings were postponed, families lined up four hours in advance of hearings in the tent court system in Brownsville to be checked for cleanliness. If families miss the call to cross, their cases can be dismissed in absentia. If there is a mistake in any paperwork, an asylum seeker will wait months for a new hearing to file it again. Some families are placed in separate proceedings. Some are given court dates two to four hours away, with no means of

**DELAYS:** A mother and her sick child wait for hours to cross the international bridge into Brownsville, Texas to receive medical care.

**LOOKING FOR ANSWERS:** A U.S. border official is confronted in January on the Gateway International Bridge by members of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus.

transportation. Eventually, CBP begins handing out strips of paper with a number to call instead of giving court dates on formal notices to appear.

In Brownsville, most public events are held in both English and Spanish. The CBP press officer who laughed at the woman with asthma later in the spring plays "Taps" on his bugle at a gathering honoring local law enforcement in front of the Cameron County courthouse. Everyone is cordial. But within the surrounding community there are class divisions based on when and why people emigrated, where they're from, how much money they have and to what extent they've assimilated. The Border Patrol vehicles swarming the streets of low-income immigrant neighborhoods and the border wall running through backyards are too commonplace to draw much outrage.

The government can't build the wall along the river because it would sink into the soft ground. Instead residents' properties are seized through eminent domain. On the south end of Brownsville, the wall runs through cotton fields. Border Patrol has to leave it open so farmers can get to and from their fields on the U.S. side.

The border region is militarized as far as 100 miles into the United States. At the Sarita checkpoint, an hour north on Interstate 69E, stacked surveillance cameras dot the road, and CBP clears each car that leaves the Rio Grande Valley. Anyone without documents who is caught having previously entered the United States without documents will likely serve time in prison.

The wall does not prevent the flow of narcotics, nor has the militarization of the Valley made life any safer. In Brownsville, stray bullets have hit joggers by sections of the border wall that run near the local community college.

It also hasn't stopped desperate people from trying to cross the river. A pregnant woman and her husband leaving the refugee camp on Mexico's side of the river made it across in late summer. Their baby was born at the hospital in Brownsville. But in August and September there were at least seven bodies discovered on the Matamoros side of the Rio Grande. One was a young man seeking asylum from Guatemala with a wife, a child and a grandmother. He brought his family over in the middle of the night without paying a smuggler. The mother and child were apprehended and returned to Mexico.

• • •

THERE IS LITTLE OR NO SUPPORT from either government, so aid is organized by locals who live on both sides of the river. Residents feed refugees by the thousands.

In January, volunteer medical staff prepare to conduct a census hoping to coax information from families, most of whom are afraid to talk for fear of losing their asylum cases, retaliation or both. There are stories and rumors of kidnappings and assaults. A doctor inside a makeshift pharmacy says she sees the cuts and bruises, and she hears the stories. Families living in tents complain that immigration judges seem disengaged, do not appear to understand the paperwork presented in court.

The asylum seekers have organized themselves on social media and advocate for humane public policy. Some run restaurants in front of tents with tables and seats made of wood, chopped from the trees. Food boils in pots on clay ovens. Crews do maintenance and sanitation work, build sinks and showers. Volunteers and residents organize schools.

But there is always the sense that the camp is not welcome at the bridge. Authorities on one occasion used machetes to destroy the tents of Mexican asylum seekers ushered into the United

Continued on next page



ERIN SHERIDAN



ERIN SHERIDAN





BOLENT KILIC

# FROM ONE FRAGILE DEMOCRACY TO ANOTHER

## LESSONS LEARNED IN TURKEY

BY YASEMIN OZER

**T**he U.S. presidential elections this Nov. 3 might be the first day of an arduous vote-tallying process that could drag on for weeks. President Trump has already refused to state that he will concede peacefully if he loses, and regularly claims that mail-in votes, greatly increased this year because of the pandemic, will be fraudulent. As a citizen of Turkey, a fragile democracy with a history of military coups, where election results are contested and fraud is always a risk, I believe Turkey offers useful lessons for U.S. voters.

On March 31, 2019, Turkish citizens went to the polls nationwide to elect mayors in their cities. As a resident of Istanbul, I cast my vote at the high school in my neighborhood. Istanbul, comparable to New York City in significance as the heart of the country's economic, social and cultural life, is arguably the most important city to win in any election. The atmosphere was tense and collective anxiety palpable. After the polling stations closed and counting of ballots began in the evening, my family gathered in front of the TV and waited for the results.

As the night progressed and the results of the Istanbul mayoral race transformed into colorful pie charts on our TV screen, Binali Yildirim, the candidate from the governing Justice and Development Party (AKP), endorsed by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, was slightly ahead of his main rival, Ekrem Imamoglu, from the opposition Republican People's Party (CHP). With tens of thousands of votes still uncounted in one of the tightest races in recent history, Yildirim prematurely declared himself the winner of the election and the mayor of Istanbul.

The state media outlet, Anadolu Agency, abruptly stopped broadcasting the vote count while the nation watched in shock. Conflicting statistics and numbers, claims of voter fraud, and a deluge of misinformation led to massive confusion and disorientation. In response, Imamoglu stood in front of cameras to assure his supporters that he and his team were not going to give up until making sure that every last ballot was counted.

As I stayed awake at night nervously waiting for the rest of the votes to be counted, viral photos of members of the parliament and volunteer citizens sleeping on top of ballot bags to protect them were circulating on social media. But the next morning, when I stepped out of my apartment, I was greeted by banners "thanking Istanbul for electing Yildirim." Clearly prepared long before the results were announced and put up overnight all over the city, the banners were visuals aimed to demoralize Imamoglu voters and claim a false victory by decorating the city with "evidence."

**PROTRACTED BATTLE:** Supporters of Ekrem Imamoglu, the secular opposition candidate, protest in 2019 against the national government's attempt to overturn the election results for mayor of Turkey's largest city. It took three months, but their candidate ultimately prevailed.

Despite the banners, once all the votes were finally counted, Imamoglu had won by a slight margin. I remember my celebration of his hard-won victory being cut short when Yildirim stated his refusal to accept the results. Istanbul voters had to wait for more than a month in limbo while the Supreme Election Council, the principal state institution in charge of elections, deliberated on the validity of the results. Clearly under pressure from the Erdogan government, the council annulled Imamoglu's win and decided that the Istanbul election had to be repeated. Despite such an undemocratic ruling, Istanbul voters overcame election fatigue, held on to hope, and showed up once again at the

polls on June 23, 2019, to elect Imamoglu as mayor again, this time with a clear margin.

As I look back over those events, I believe there are some strategies that might be applicable to the upcoming U.S. presidential election. The first step is to accept that the election results might take an unusually long time to establish, and even then, they might be contested. In such moments of political uncertainty, widespread confusion and collective anxiety must be expected. Systematic dissemination of manipulative misinformation is a real danger. Therefore, it is crucially important to insist on counting all the votes, check sources and verify information before sharing news, help community members remain hopeful, and manage collective emotions to keep the morale high through phases of uncertainty.

The second step is to try to think beyond a framework of U.S. exceptionalism. Over the last couple of weeks, the more I talk to my American friends, the more I realize that they have a subtle but strong sense of faith that the nation's purportedly independent institutions will safeguard free and fair elections. Despite evidence of systematic voter suppression and gerrymandering (not to mention the 2000 election, when the Supreme Court voted 5-4 along party lines to stop the recount of votes in Florida and hand the presidency to George W. Bush), there seems to be an unshakable belief that elections cannot be stolen here, and that coups cannot happen in the United States, unlike in the rest of the world.

I understand how difficult it is to grapple with possibilities that seem viscerally impossible. My suggestion to think of the United States as a "fragile democracy" might sound outrageous. Yet in the name of protecting some of the most basic principles of electoral democracy, why not abandon this naive sense of comfort, think beyond U.S. exceptionalism, listen to the citizens of other countries, and be prepared for what used to seem impossible, but now is likely?

## MIGRANTS

*Continued from previous page*

States in the middle of the night under an alleged agreement between CBP and local officials. In the winter, children walk around in flip flops in 40-degree weather, and tents fill with water and blow over in the wind.

The Gulf Cartel's presence is not discussed but is always felt. Photos occasionally surface of cartel members, armed with military-grade rifles, handing out food, supplies, and treats to the poor. Recently the local faction allegedly bribed taxi drivers to park their cabs on the international bridges, in protest of the governor of the state of Tamaulipas ordering a federal drug task into the city. Public buses are placed in the middle of the highways leading out of Matamoros. Residents are warned of a potential "large-scale" conflict and told to shut down businesses and stay inside. Someone sets a Coca-Cola truck on fire in the center of town. The asylum seekers on the levee have nowhere to go.

Across the river in a small shopping district on the north side of Brownsville is a former Walmart, one of the facilities in which the world witnessed children being held in cages. Locals who work at the center tend to keep quiet about their place of employment. Money means survival. There is a Southwest Key facility in downtown Brownsville where unaccompanied minors are held in Office of Refugee Resettlement custody. Only once, I see a teenage boy pressing his face against the wrought-iron fence.

In April a friend tells me about a historic Catholic chapel along the river, an hour up the border. She says this of the land:

"There are a lot of Border Patrol really close by. You hear the hum of the helicopter and you hear the buzzing sounds of the patrolling boats. And yet, people go there. We're standing our ground, not letting them take away access to our river, to our land. That river is so beautiful because water is a resource for life. But when you're there, you also become aware of all the death that has happened in the river, the people who have tried to seek asylum and drowned. This water brings you life, this water brings you resources, this water brings you prosperity. You're here, aware of the death, aware of the sadness, aware of the joy. It's a very special place where you hear the sound of the birds and everything is peaceful and calm."

*Erin Sheridan was a Spring 2018 Independent intern. Since then, she has covered housing displacement and human rights and worked for the past year as a staff reporter for the Brownsville Herald.*





ZACHNYS DIAVO

# BOLIVIA VOTES FOR MORE MAS

## SOCIALIST PARTY RIDES A WAVE OF POPULAR SUPPORT ONE YEAR AFTER A RIGHT-WING COUP

BY LINDA FARTHING

**T**he landslide victory of the Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) in Bolivian elections Oct. 18 is a real boost for a left that has been flagging across Latin America in recent years. As a referendum on whether left governments are viable, the win sent a loud and clear message that Bolivians prefer a left-of-center government to rule by elites.

Luis Arce and his running mate David Choquehuanca defeated their nearest rivals by more than 20 percent and won more votes than Evo Morales had in contested elections a year ago, suggesting that the electorate didn't reject the MAS social-democratic project so much as oppose the continuation of Evo Morales in power.

"It would be nice to have someone new," said Cochabamba street vendor Ivon Flores during the runup to last year's elections. Morales ran for a fourth term last November in violation of the 2009 constitution and after losing a 2016 referendum on whether he could be a candidate again. This desire to hold onto power is a chronic problem for left governments in countries with weak institutions like Bolivia.

A significant factor propelling the MAS win was the rearticulation of popular indigenous, peasant and union movements after Morales was ousted in a coup last November. These movements had lost much of their independence and influence during Morales's almost 14 years as president, with their leaders absorbed into government, coopted by benefits such as government-financed union headquarters or marginalized when they disagreed with the MAS.

Social movements reorganized rapidly after the November 2019 coup, showing independence from Morales when they differed with him on candidates for the elections originally scheduled for May 2019. Arce and Choquehuanca were a compromise choice.

A massive blockade across the country in August forced "interim" President Jeanine Áñez, who had been installed by the far right last November, to call elections in October. She postponed them twice, ostensibly because of COVID, but in fact the virus served as a cover to prolong repression.

The mishandling of the coronavirus by Áñez's government impoverished people whose incomes had spiked dur-

ing Morales's presidency, and many found themselves with insufficient money to buy food. With a higher percentage of Bolivians working in informal jobs than anywhere else in the world, few could stick to the strict lockdown imposed by Áñez without much in the way of public assistance. This facilitated the spread of the virus leading to the world's third-highest per-capita death rate. Whatever public confidence remained in Áñez dissipated entirely when the health minister was arrested for fraud involving a multimillion dollar ventilator purchase.

The MAS win signals the vibrancy of Bolivian democracy in a country with a long history of instability and unconstitutional political transitions. Although the interim government called the previous MAS government a "dictatorship" and Evo Morales a "tyrant," it recognized the 2020 election results almost immediately. The only naysayer is the candidate who finished third place, far-right firebrand Luis Fernando Camacho. He tweeted Oct. 20 that the results were fraudulent, but while demonstrations erupted in three cities, little violence was reported. Last November Camacho bragged that he persuaded the police to mutiny and his father convinced the military to desert Morales, moves that together precipitated Evo's downfall.

The opposition candidates focused their campaigns on defeating the MAS at all costs, while Arce and Choquehuanca astutely emphasized the economic stability the previous MAS government had brought compared to the current economic meltdown. Venomous and racist statements by the far-right opposition convinced many of those with indigenous roots that they were safer with the MAS. "We don't want the racism of the past to come back," said Petronilla Guzmán, who sells fruit outside a market in La Paz.

Both the police and military were granted immunity by Áñez's government when they violently repressed working-class and indigenous people protesting Morales's ouster. Two massacres caused almost 30 deaths and hundreds wounded. "The repression we suffered was worse than under the dictatorships that I lived through as a student because they threatened our families and to burn our houses down," said veteran union leader Rolando Borda Padilla from Santa Cruz.

As the new standard-bearers for progressive politics in Latin America, Arce and Choquehuanca face enormous challenges. The most immediate is the coronavirus and growing poverty. Linked to this, but only partially caused by it, is an economy that has contracted almost 8% to date in 2020.

Arce has proposed resuscitating the economy through expanded biodiesel production and by industrializing Bolivia's lithium reserves. These options both have high environmental costs, echoing the ecological predicaments that plagued the Morales administration. Deforestation has doubled since 2015, the highest rate in Latin America. 2020 is the second year of disastrous fires, most of them set by large-scale soy and cattle producers to clear land, resulting in the destruction of large swathes of eastern Bolivia, including parts of parks and indigenous territories.

Getting the military and police, whose privileges expanded under Áñez, to fully commit to civilian rule will be high on the MAS agenda, as is the goal of containing the far right. Its candidate, Luis Fernando Camacho, won 14.3% of the vote. Then there is the question of whether

the new MAS government will prosecute Jeanine Áñez, her Interior Minister Arturo Murillo, who was the architect of much of the repression, and other officials for the violence they unleashed. Or will they successfully flee to the United States or Brazil as others have in the past?

Within MAS, keeping the charismatic and powerful Morales in check will not be easy. While Arce and Choquehuanca have stated repeatedly that he will not have a governmental role, they both worked under him for over a decade and he still exerts enormous influence over the party. "We see him as a historical figure," Luis Arce told *The New York Times*.

Strengthening middle leadership levels is essential, according to Juan Carlos Pinto, who worked in the vice president's office under the previous MAS government. This goes hand in hand with controlling the patronage politics that plagued the MAS just as it has all administrations in Bolivia.

It appears some sectors of MAS have been humbled by its year out of office. For the first time in many years, leaders of the union movement and MAS militants like Rolando Borda Padilla talk about "the errors we made. We had people who took advantage of the process for personal ends," he explained. "We must engage in a process of criticism and self-criticism."

Arce and Choquehuanca's 54.6% win does not guarantee a solid base of support going forward, as MAS lost the two thirds of the Legislative Assembly it had enjoyed since 2011. According to sociologist Julio Córdova Villazón, after eight years of almost complete hegemony, the MAS will need to relearn how to negotiate with the opposition.

But all that lies ahead. For now, MAS is basking in its success. At the victory party Sunday night, Arce promised, "We will govern for all Bolivians and construct a national unity government. ... We are going to restart our process of change and move it forward."

### UNDETERRED:

*Supporters of the Movimiento al Socialismo, or MAS, march in Bolivia in advance of the elections that their party won by more than 25 points.*



# JOURNEY TO THE UNDERWORLD & BACK

*Unforgetting: A Memoir of Family, Migration, Gangs, and Revolution in The Americas*

BY ROBERTO LOVATO  
HARPERCOLLINS, 2020  
325 PAGES

By John Tarleton

“I had to go into all of these different underworlds,” says Roberto Lovato of *Unforgetting*, his new memoir which tries to make sense of a life filled with personal and political struggles.

Raised as an American kid in San Francisco who admired Willie Mays and identified with the Brady Bunch, Lovato only discovers his Salvadoran identity and the dark family secrets that come with it in fits and starts.

His journey of self-discovery ricochets back and forth between the rural El Salvador of the 1930s, the Bay Area of the 1970s, the FMLN guerrilla movement that he would eventually join and present-day El Salvador. Along the way, he has to excavate the harrowing childhood memories that haunt his emotionally distant father and face his own self-doubts when he falls in love with a beautiful rebel leader.

However, *Unforgetting* is about more than Lovato’s personal journey.

It’s also a book about imperialism, how the economic and political structures it imposes warp whole societies and how some people will always resist. In El Salvador, a volcano-studded land where wealthy elites have long ruled the dispossessed majority with terrifying cruelty, resistance has often come at a harrowing price.

In a bout of late Cold War hysteria, El Salvador and neighboring Nicaragua became an obsession of U.S. foreign policy makers during the 1980s. Leftist movements were fomenting subversion, President Ronald Reagan warned, and were only a three-day drive away from the U.S.-Mexico border.

Solidarity groups, including one that Lovato joined, sprang up in cities across the United States to aid fleeing refugees and promote public opposition to a U.S. military invasion in the region. Instead, the Reagan administration unleashed U.S.-funded death squads and mercenary armies that killed an estimated 200,000 people in Central America, shattering already fragile societies.

The more recent tragedy of Central American immigrant children locked in cages is a legacy of that earlier era, Lovato argues. And just as he seeks to unforget his own personal history and become stronger for it, he also invites the United States as a nation to do so as well.

**INDYPENDENT:** *Why did you write this book? Why are you releasing it now?*

ROBERTO LOVATO: There were many reasons. One was the systematic erasure of Central Americans from the English language. The child separation issue was one of the biggest stories of 2018. I did a study for the *Columbia Journalism Review* and found there were zero Central American scholars cited, zero Central American community leaders, zero Central American lawyers and zero Central American journalists or any other experts. In a country where we’ve been here for decades, it reflects the racial amnesia and erasure that marks our lives and has devastating effects.

*What is it about El Salvador that you want Americans to learn from this book?*

I want people to learn about not just Salvadorans but

about the United States. The book is as much about the US as it is about Central America. The histories, both political, economic, cultural, and familial in my case, are intertwined and inseparable in the modern era. I want people to understand the effects of forgetting, the dangers of forgetting, for individuals, for families and for nations. And I want folks to see the benefits of unforgetting, excavating those truths that afflict the powerful.

*You have been bipartisan in your criticism of U.S. leaders. Still, you say Trump is especially dangerous. Why is that?*

The United States itself is a threat of epic proportions to the world, but Donald Trump weaponizes it in very particular ways. The United States hasn’t been as hollowed out by neoliberal capitalism as it is now. The separation between rich and poor in the United States surpasses that of El Salvador. We see the emptying out of whatever re-



mains of the welfare state, the militarization of the police, attempts to introduce the military through backdoor means within the borders. We’ve never seen this speed and scale of the hollowing out of the U.S. economy. And, I would argue, its cultural system because you can’t hollow out an economy without creating an imaginary that explains it away,

*It’s been a long time coming.*

The decline of the United States began in the late ‘70s to early 80s, when Reagan and Thatcher really started us on the turn towards neoliberalism and the changes in the global economy. People were trying to adjust their storyline about the United States. Both political parties try to keep alive the myth of American exceptionalism. El Salvador tells another story of this country.

Over the past 30 years, I’ve visited mass grave sites. I’ve been pursued by death squads. I’ve had friends and family killed by U.S.-backed governments. I’ve seen chil-

dren put in cages by Barack Obama. I’ve risked my life as a journalist to get the story out. The story of U.S. fascism from a Salvadoran perspective isn’t new because I fought a fascist military dictatorship that was backed by the United States.

*The right wing always needs an enemy to justify itself. For decades the communists were the official enemy, then Al Qaeda and Islamic extremism became the new official enemy. Now it’s Antifa and so-called “anarchist jurisdictions” such as Portland, Seattle and New York.*

I write about “counterinsurgency policing” in my book. I track how the US sent military advisors to El Salvador to train the military and the death squads. After the war, those trainers came back home to roost. I found out they ended up at the LAPD, at the San Francisco police department, at the NYPD. When the LAPD created anti-gang units, they were trained by former Pentagon trainers from El Salvador and other parts of Latin America.

Counterinsurgency policing starts taking hold in the US following the war in El Salvador. In the aftermath of the 1992 Los Angeles riots, Then Attorney General William Barr transferred 300 FBI agents away from tracking foreign threats to focusing on gangs such as MS-13. That begins the war on gangs that combined with the militarization of police, which we’re dealing with today.

*You take great risks in your book to provide a more nuanced look at the Salvadoran gangs without excusing their violent behavior.*

I was an “at-risk” youth who engaged in criminal activities, as did my father. I use that experience to explain to the reader how somebody becomes a “criminal.” It’s not so separate from being a member of a family, especially in a place where the vast production of criminality is what governments do.

*You refer to your book as a journey through the underworld.*

I had to go into all these different underworlds to excavate the heart lost in the darkness. We never lost our heart as Salvadorans, but it appeared we did in the English language media. Joan Dideon once wrote of El Salvador that “terror is the given of the place.” I tell a story that says that love is also the given of the place.

We in the US could really use hearing that right now because there’s an increased amount of terror in the United States. We’re going to need mountains of tenderness, of love, to sustain ourselves for the world that’s coming — not just surviving Trump, the rise of a neo-fascist mass movement, the pandemic and economic decline but the catastrophic impacts of climate change.

*Anything else that could help get us through these difficult times?*

We’re going to need what sociologists call a millenarian sensibility. We’re in the middle of a moment of epic proportions. But people aren’t responding to it with an epic sensibility yet. People are still sitting in front of their screens, tweeting and making light of things.

Most of the literature in the United States didn’t prepare us for this moment. Neither did the movies. So I wanted to write a book that did what I didn’t see, which was to start preparing us for adopting a more millenarian sensibility. We need a revolutionary outlook to face these epic challenges.





BRANDON O'NEILL

# TRUMP DEPRESSION HOTLINE

*Dear Reverend Billy,  
I can't wait for the election to be over,  
hopefully with Trump being trounced so  
badly we never hear from him again. But  
then I see news reports that the election  
could be dragged out for weeks or months  
with prolonged vote counting, lawsuits,  
protests and counter-protests. Ugh! When  
can we become a semi-normal country  
again? Four years of this is enough.*

REBECCA  
Upper West Side

Dear Rebecca,  
What you want to return to, the way it  
was before? — WE CAN'T GO BACK, RE-  
BECCA! That wasn't "normal" then and  
won't be now. After all, that paradise you  
are nostalgic for was the world that cre-  
ated Trump.

You want to return to the semi-normal  
country again. Remember that we live in  
the bizarre and violent world that uses  
\$400 billion a year in advertising to per-  
suade us that all of this is normal. We are  
immersed in seductions. Thousands of  
products are singing to us that our lives are  
normal. They dare us to be unhappy.

And we are persuaded. The permanent  
wars — that's normal. The murderous  
police — normal. Racist landlords killing  
neighborhoods — normal. Meth despair  
and death — normal. Suicides among vets,  
teens, native peoples — normal. Accelerat-  
ing extinction around the world — normal.  
Trump — normal.

• • •

*Rev. Billy,  
When I look back on the past four years  
one of the things that most disturbs me is  
that Trump has maintained the support of  
roughly 40 percent of the country no mat-  
ter how badly he has acted. What kind  
of person is drawn to Trump? Or even  
worse, what kind of person knows he's a  
vile human being but still supports him  
despite their misgivings? Will more than  
a few of them ever change for the better?*

PERPLEXED  
Sunset Park

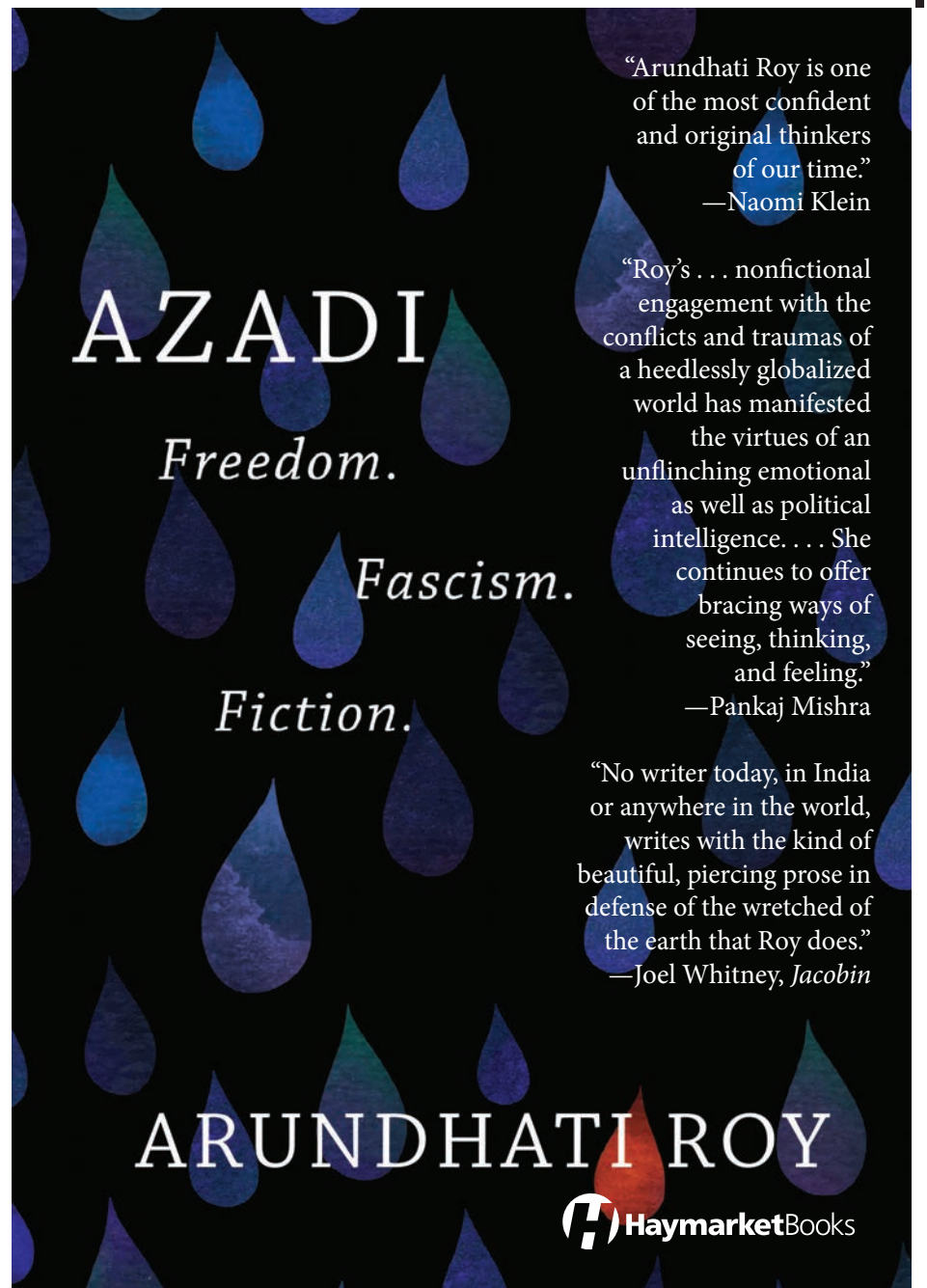
Dear Perplexed,  
Most of your letter is exactly Trumpian.  
The intolerance of fundamentalism is on  
display. But I will address the one word in  
your letter that is compassionate, reason-  
able, imaginative and healing... and that  
would be "Perplexed." If we are truly con-  
fused, then we should go further into it —  
relax into the contradictions that baffle.  
Now we can change for the better.

The election is scheduled to create a  
nation of bitterness. The losing half will  
be bitter, and the winning half will be bit-  
ter. We will be talking like your letter, but  
without the window of fresh air that you  
opened when you signed off with "Per-  
plexed." But over the coming months we  
as a community, the United States — we  
will need to see clearly the systems of hat-  
red that we have inherited and change. We  
have to give ourselves a break. We have  
lived in myriad forms of forced labor, from  
the old Chosen People to the latest techno-  
logical chauvinism.

I believe that we will realize this in the  
next months. We'll be at the edge of the  
cliff. We will look down into our death,  
and we'll step back and look at each other.  
We will make a choice, to bring humor and  
music back to our national commons. We  
are definitely taking it to the brink, but  
let's remember that this is where we al-  
ways were, with the violent suppression of  
perplexity that raised us from childhood.  
What is more truly evil than the idea of the  
chosen people? ... The greatest nation and  
greatest species and gender and race ... We  
have been raised with forces of judgment in  
us that have to arouse compassion.

We are good people, if only we take our  
perplexed self all the way, till we are laugh-  
ing with each other, touching each other.

**REVEREND BILLY IS PASTOR OF THE CHURCH  
OF STOP SHOPPING. HAVE A QUESTION FOR  
THE REVEREND? JUST EMAIL REV.BILLY@IN-  
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—Naomi Klein

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a heedlessly globalized  
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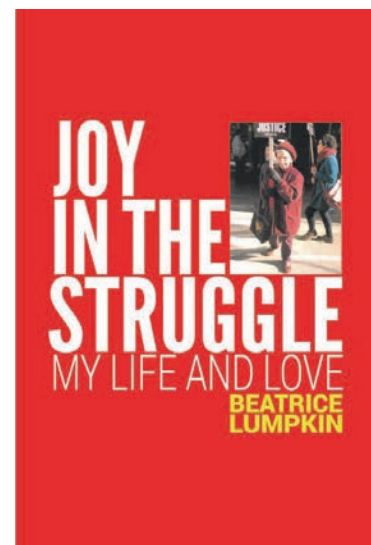
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